

Top Tips for a Tidy Transition

Leaving a family home can be as much an emotional disconnection as a physical one. But at what point does the cost of emotional connection to a house outweigh an older adult's wellbeing?

Suzi Brown explains

Leaving a family home can be as much an emotional disconnection as a physical one. The family home might be where you brought your brand-new babies home to, where they were raised, where celebrations and commiserations were experienced. But at what point does the cost of emotional connection to a house outweigh an older adult's wellbeing? It's inevitable that at some point it will become more clear that the season for your family to enjoy the security of that home has passed. Time to pass the property baton to other whanau to flourish under its roof.

The question is, HOW does one even begin the process emotionally or physically, without being buried under a mountain of unneeded but previously loved possessions? Let's investigate.

Robyn from Transition Navigators, an organisation who works with elders to find the accommodation that best fits their needs, stresses the importance of not underestimating the time it takes to talk through the options to arrive at the right choice. Ideally, it should be a conversation started in your late 50's or early 60's. She comments that everyone's Plan A is always the best scenario, which is rarely the reality. Plan B involves the reality of planning and saving for a successful outcome. Think of it this way, we spend lots of time transitioning children from one important step to the other - preschool – primary school – higher options, but where is that transition planning and support at the other end?



Do your sums

The best strategy is to start by asking the difficult questions and doing some basic maths for comparison. While staying in your own home may mean you're saving on some things; also remember that moving into a retirement village means you can budget all the expected fees ahead of time; and you don't need to worry about rates. For example, as part of 'Ryman's Peace of Mind Guarantee' for independent living and serviced-apartment living, your basic weekly fee will never increase, unless you change your living arrangements or add extra aged-care options. Their fixed weekly fee for independent living covers maintenance, services and lifestyle (social time and happy hour, their activities programme). You can enjoy the benefits of disposing of those annoying tasks like washing windows and organising building insurance. If you need someone to change your light bulb, simply call up the maintenance man and it will be done. For some people, removing that to-do list equals independence more than remaining in their own community home.

Let the professionals help

If figuring this all out is just a bit too overwhelming, there are businesses who specialise in helping through this process. The beauty of using an outsider is that they aren't emotionally involved in your life, so they have the benefit of viewing your situation from a fresh angle. They can assist with de-cluttering and navigating your move. I sat down for a quick chat with two experienced women who provide practical solutions through their businesses which specialise in this area.

Transition Navigators

With a warm and welcoming twinkle Robyn is experienced in helping older people and their families make informed choices. Her organisation works with older people who are planning to downsize from their family home, or with families when a health crisis signals a change in

circumstance. Her role is to research the best options and work with older adults and their family to navigate a smooth transition. Robyn has a wealth of useful experience, with a PhD on the wellbeing of independently living older people – both those living in retirement villages and in the community.

Neat Spaces

Helen's business, as a Professional Organiser, works alongside elders, helping bring more order and efficiency while de-cluttering and managing life transitions. Her services include setting up sustainable systems, storage solutions, creating usable spaces, paper management and deceased estate assistance. Your own private Marie Kondo with a reliable touch!

What about all that dreaded 'sorting out'?

If moving house looks like the best solution. It could be time to tackle a monstrous sort out session. Downsizing from a family home full of memories is an emotional time, so how do we identify what to keep, and recognise what to donate or sell? How do we navigate the emotional upheaval of letting go of items steeped in memories? Once again, this is something that takes time. Ideally we need to start this task early, thinking about what items are really important to us and then communicating that with our children or loved ones. Maybe you need to ask what sparks joy for them and be able to give them these items in advance. Belongings that were really important to previous generations can hang a heavy mantle of responsibility on your shoulders. If you don't want these items, and neither do your children then some difficult choices need to be made. Although you might feel a bit silly, you could try the Marie Kondo approach of holding the item, thanking it for its use and value for a moment, and then releasing it. If you're going through this process with your elderly parent, remember to show empathy and listen to the associated stories, even if you've heard them plenty before! Helen from Neat Spaces likens the process to an onion – peeling one layer at a time. She notes there is a fear around the connection of letting possessions go, meaning letting memories go. Often clients think when they donate or sell an item, they're letting go of all the special memories, but in taking time to say goodbye you can retain those memories. Find peace from moving into a new season. A new space can provide the fresh appeal of a less cluttered environment which will result in a less chaotic mind.

Anyone heard of 'Swedish Death Cleaning'?



Once again the Swedish have found a fabulous way to do something boring much better than anyone else on the planet. Heck, they probably look gloriously tanned, blonde and beautiful doing it too. The idea is this: once you reach the end of middle age (or round about that time), you quite simply just get rid of stuff that's built up and not needed anymore so that no one else has to do it once you pop your Crocs. In Sweden, it

is called *döstädning* – *dö* meaning "death" and *städning* meaning "cleaning." The 2018 book by author Margareta Manusson called "The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning: How to Free Yourself and Your Family from a Lifetime of Clutter" centres on this topic and is touted as "a charming, practical, and unsentimental approach to putting a home in order while reflecting on the tiny joys that make up a long life." Apparently Manusson's method makes the process uplifting rather than overwhelming, so it could be worth a look if you're in the market for inspiration. Her book reminds us that once we've decluttered, we'll be able to focus better on the really important things in life. Once the decluttering is complete, you'll feel less stressed as a reflection of less mess on the outside. The reality of the whole process of Swedish Death Cleaning is that getting rid of items reminds us that things don't last forever, including us, and wouldn't you rather be the one to make the choices about what happens to all your stuff, than some other person who might just biff it all in the skip?

Stay put

Check out all your options.

Could you stay put for another few years with the addition of services coming into your home? To know if you should stay or go officially, your GP team or a community health worker can refer you for a needs assessment. These exist to find out whether you need support, and to assess the most suitable support you specifically need. The support services could cover:

- Personal care such as getting out of bed, showering, dressing and helping you with your medications
- Equipment to help make your home as safe as possible
- Household support including cleaning and preparing meals
- Carer support – this is help for a person who lives with you or who looks after you for four hours or more each day



A good place to start for services are Access Community Health, Healthcare New Zealand or Nurse Maude (Christchurch only).

What place do we choose?

In the industry they're known as "The Big Six" – Ryman, Metlife, Summerset, Bupa, Oceania, and Arvida. They are significant players in the New Zealand Retirement Village market, and between them they have an estimated 43% of villages throughout the country. You might have a natural inclination of which one you'd like to investigate due to location, amenities or already having friends in that particular village, but if you're a bit unsure which direction to turn we have a handy suggestion! www.agedadvisor.nz is an independent review website specialising in aged care. The benefit of visiting Aged Advisor is that the reviews are completely unbiased by the companies themselves. Search up your top choices and read reviews from people who actually live in the villages or aged care facilities without the skew of village marketing. There are also helpful articles and due to the success of their retirement village reviews, the website will be expanding into funeral, legal and financial reviews. Don't forget to pay it forward when you're all settled in your lovely new abode by writing your own review on your chosen provider too.

Remember to be empathetic to yourself when making your final choices, but also remember to weigh your choice up with the concern it would cause your loved ones. At the very least, maybe get a bit of Swedish Death Cleaning underway, and reduce the trip hazards in your home whilst also preparing to relocate. Give your choices time, talk the options over and you'll be sorted, tidy and in no time.

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