

What to do with the personal possessions of a loved one

People collect all manner of possessions over their lifetimes and often these will evoke powerful memories of that person's character and the moments you shared together. This can make the process of sorting out their possessions a difficult task to endure.



In this guide we will offer some advice and guidance on how to get things done efficiently but also how you can turn this experience into something positive.

Getting help

The first decision you will need to make is whether you can handle the task of sorting out your loved one's belongings yourself or whether you need help. While this can often come down to the size of the person's estate, i.e. how many belongings they have, the size of said items and how easy it will be to physically complete the job, it is important to also consider how you might handle the job emotionally.

It can often be helpful to enlist the help of friends and family, especially those who knew your loved one well and may be more sympathetic to your position. Their support and advice could be crucial in helping you to complete the task efficiently and making important decisions over what kind of items should be kept and what needs to be let go of.

Whether or not you decide to ask for the help of your family and friends, you should at least seek their advice before you begin sorting, in particular you should find out if there are any items that they would like you to keep for them as this can save further upset and disagreements down the line.

Being prepared

Preparation can go a long way to making sure that the job of sorting out belongings goes smoothly and there a number of items that you should remember to bring with you including the following:

- Bin bags
- Gloves
- Marker pens
- Cardboard boxes
- Plastic boxes
- Newspaper / bubble wrap (for delicate items)

You might also wish to consider transport, especially if there are a large number of items that need to go to the rubbish tip. Alternatively you might decide to hire a skip if there are a large number of bulky items.

Taking your time

Disposing of your loved one's possessions can be a difficult task emotionally and physically and it's important that you don't push yourself too hard. During bereavement it is very common for people to find it hard to let go of items. Commonly this is because they bring back memories of the person that has passed away. However, this



doesn't have to be a negative experience and you may find that by taking your time to look at things like photographs, diaries and other personal items that you might begin to feel better as you come to terms with your loss and develop a more complete picture of your loved ones life.

Planning

It is very important to plan effectively before you get started as with so much emotion and so many raw feelings it is likely that you could get sidetracked and the task may begin to take much longer than you initially expected.



You should prepare a rough plan. Perhaps your loved one lived in a small flat and you may expect to finish sorting it in just a day, but if their property is much larger then you may have to sort a room at a time.

One easy way to approach this task is to sort belongings into three clearly marked piles.

The 'keep' pile

This pile should be for items that hold meaning to you and you do not wish to part with. Everyone has their own reasons and memories for wanting to keep a particular item and while it may seem inconceivable for a stranger that you might wish to keep an old jumper or a particularly garish tablecloth, it might remind you of happy times and hold special value to you, and that's all that is important.

The 'maybe' pile

While it would be nice to keep everything, this isn't always physically possible. You should set yourself some ground rules so as to be able to make some progress with the clearance.

However, if an item is clearly not junk yet you are still unsure as to whether to keep it or not then you should put it in the maybe pile. To help you make a final decision you should seek the advice of people that you trust who may be able to give you an impartial and less emotional decision, which is what is sometimes needed.

The 'let go' pile

It's important that you don't try to keep too many possessions. While you might feel guilty at first, you should remember that the most important things are memories not possessions, so try to set limits on the amount of items that you will keep in each category, for example "I will keep 10 books that are important to me".

Some items that you find around will probably not be worth keeping under any circumstances. Things like old batteries, perishable food, newspapers and other odds and ends will either want to be recycled or thrown away and focusing on these types of items first can be a great way to actually make some significant headway in sorting through your loved ones possessions.

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What to do with what you find?

There are numerous uses for the items that you clear from your loved ones home and while the thought of parting ways with items that hold happy memories can leave you feeling down, you should remember that those items could go on to make someone else happy too.



Here are a few of the common items that you might find while clearing out your loved ones home and some of our suggested uses, or ways that you can give them away.

Clothing

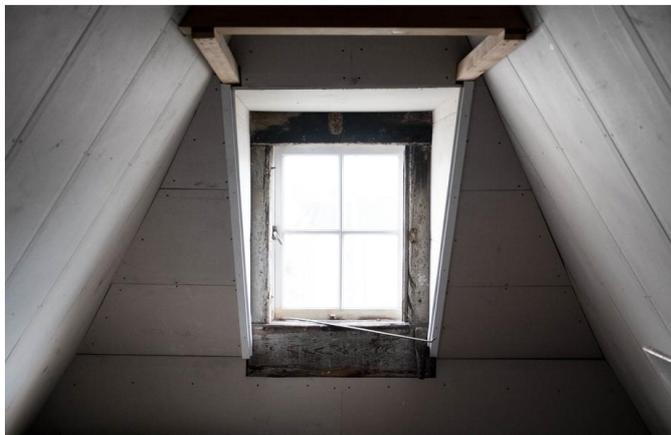
When it comes to clearing out your loved ones clothing you should think about what items might benefit someone else. This could mean donating jackets, shirts and dresses to a charity shop but it might equally mean keeping hold of a wedding dress or smart suit for relatives to use themselves one day.

Jewellery

Items such as jewellery can sometimes have a high value and it's important to think carefully about what you do with these items. A small independent jeweller will likely be able to offer you a valuation of jewellery and may have a faster turnaround than a high street chain. However, you should be sure to think carefully before you sell the item and seek the opinions and advice of your loved ones and other relatives.

Furniture

Drawers, tables, cupboards and sofas can be some of the harder items to know what to do with. They are often large, bulky and difficult to move, so you should enlist the help of friends or family to assist you. When it comes to finding a new home for them you may be able to find a local charity shop willing to take them off your hands, or alternatively you might know someone badly in need of furniture, such as younger family members just starting up their own home.



Electrical items

Electrical items, such as TV's, alarm clocks, kitchen appliances, radios, cameras, hair dryers and blenders can be dealt with in a number of ways. If they are in good condition then you might be able to donate them to a charity shop, or even sell them online on a site like [eBay](#) or [Gumtree](#). If they are in a poor condition then you can either find someone to repair the item or recycle it, however you should be aware that some items might not be recyclable.

Decorative items

Decorative items such as mirrors and ornaments can again be passed on to friends or family or donated to a charity shop. Alternatively you might feel they are suitable to be taken to an auction or a car-boot sale.

Books, CD's, records

Books, CD's, tapes and records can all be donated to charity shops or recycled if you don't have space for them in your home. Alternatively, you may be able to find someone interested in taking them off your hands on an online bidding site like eBay.

Food

Unless the person who's house you are clearing out has been out of their home for a long period of time their cupboards, fridge and freezer might still be full of food which needs



to be removed. Much of the food that you will find may be perishable and will need to be disposed of, however you might find another use for non-perishable items such as canned goods which could be donated to a local homeless shelter or food bank.

Paperwork

When clearing your loved one's personal affects you should be careful to either keep or securely shred any items which have personal information on.

How to turn the experience in to a positive one

Although the process of sorting through your loved ones belongings can be a heart-wrenching one, you should remember that they are only possessions and the things that are most important are your memories. With that in mind, you should try to take photographs of any items which you would prefer to keep but you don't have space for as this way you can look back at them at a later date, or even share stories with your children or other loved ones.

The tasks involved such as moving heavy furniture, sorting through boxes and cleaning can be physically demanding but by inviting friends and family to help you out you can share stories about your loved one and turn the experience in to something positive.

Choosing an experienced and understanding funeral director can be a huge help during the grieving process and can allow you to concentrate on getting your loved one's affairs in order.

Our team are on hand to answer any questions and support you to help you with the necessary arrangements. Please call us on 0151 228 3900, or leave us a message through our contact us page by clicking [here](#).

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