

## **Understanding the Emotional Rollercoaster of Downsizing**

Fear is the primary emotion affecting seniors in the downsizing process: fear of relationships, fear of possessions and fear of the unknown. Fear is very real. Being aware, acknowledging, appreciating and accepting this emotion is the first step to aiding in the transition process.

### **Relationships**

Emotions run very high when a senior is getting ready to move. They are leaving the house that they have invested 30, 40 or even 50+ years. They are leaving the community and neighbors where they raised their family, played bridge once a week, depended upon one another for that missing ingredient to finish dinner and watched over each other's children. The safe and secure environment is being left behind to be replaced with uncertainty.

Family relationships are also taxed during this time. There hundreds of questions being asked, coming from all directions and sometimes even a lack of family support. The senior asks: Why don't you want my prized possessions? While the children are overheard saying: Why did she throw that out? I wanted it. Why did Sue get the lamp I was taking? Who gets what? What goes where? Family members often begin to fight among themselves. Each person is an individual and everyone has their own way of doing things. Road blocks are formed and the task becomes a very bumpy ride.

### **Possessions**

A house full of "stuff" can be daunting. Imagine forty years of "items" packed into a 1400sq ft home. Every crevice full, from the attic to the crawl space and do not forget the shed and garage! There is a fear of having to rush through the packing and the possibility of tossing out treasured items. What do I do with all the stuff? How can I accomplish this on my own? Where can I get boxes? What am I taking with me? What will fit into my new space? What do I trash? Will this go to charity? Does Mary want this figurine she gave me? This is going to take forever and I don't have the time. The house has been sold, and the possession date is coming.

### **Unknown**

Moving to a foreign location is unsettling. Tasks like figuring out where to get groceries, where to do laundry, and where to catch the bus may have been exciting in our younger years, but for many seniors it is a fearful experience. Will the neighbors be helpful? Will I still see my friends? Are the phone and TV working? They are all very real concerns.

Some seniors are unable to participate in the process due to failing health as they have either been hospitalized or relocated to a care facility. They become anxious about not being

able to oversee the packing of their items. Can my family do my memories justice? Are my treasures just seen as trash to them? What will happen to my mother's lace tablecloth? Will I be able to find the picture, painted by my granddaughter, or has it been filed in the trash? The fear of not being in control haunts many.

There is light at the end of the tunnel! Emotions of relief are dominant, once time is made available to sort through belongings. Items no longer needed are let go of and the joy of displaying prized possessions, and therefore memories, is obvious. Rooms become safer for mobility as the decluttering continues. Peace of mind comes to the senior; they are still in control.

Caregivers/adult children also feel relief as things and details are taken care of and their family member is in a safe and comforting place.

Sure, navigating the emotional journey of downsizing is difficult- it's filled with ups and downs for both the caregiver/family and the seniors. This is in fact why some families have shown increasing interest in the services of a "third party" to guide them on the path.

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