

Age Wise

The Family Caregiver's
Guide to What to Expect
as Your Parents Age



SILVER SOLUTIONS

Chapter 9

Home Emptying & Sale Prep

A Compassionate, Practical Guide for What Comes After Downsizing or Loss

For many families, home emptying is the part of the aging journey no one plans for.

The move to assisted living is complete—or a parent has passed—and suddenly there’s a house full of belongings, memories, and decisions that can no longer be postponed. What looks straightforward from the outside quickly becomes overwhelming. The work is physical. The time commitment is substantial. And emotionally, it can feel like making final decisions long before anyone is ready.

“Most families aren’t prepared for how much labor goes into emptying a home,” says Laura Olivares, Senior Move Manager and Co-Founder of Silver Solutions. “And they’re even less prepared for how emotional it can be—especially when adult children feel like they’re closing a chapter too soon.”

This chapter is designed to help you understand what home emptying really involves—and how to approach it with clarity, confidence, and emotional resolve—whether you’re preparing a home for sale, returning a rental, or navigating the loss of a loved one.

When Does Home Emptying Become Necessary?

Home emptying typically follows a major life transition, most often:

- Downsizing to a safer, more manageable home
- A move to assisted living or memory care
- The loss of a parent or loved one

In each of these moments, families are often surprised by how much work remains even after the initial transition is complete. Beyond furniture are decades of accumulated belongings—items tucked into closets, cabinets, attics, and garages—that require time, planning, coordination, and emotional awareness to address thoughtfully.

When It's More Than Junk

One of the most common misconceptions families have is confusing home emptying with a clean-out.

A clean-out is transactional: *bag it, box it, haul it away.*

A thoughtful home emptying process is deliberate and respectful. It focuses on preserving what matters, redistributing family treasures and belongings intentionally, and preparing the home for its next purpose.

“For some families, a fast clean-out is exactly what they want,” Laura explains. *“But most want to know that nothing important was missed—that memories were respected and decisions were made carefully, so the future isn’t filled with regret.”*

A successful outcome depends on intention.

Start With a Conversation—Before Entering the Home

Before anyone opens a drawer or begins sorting, families need to pause and align around a few essential questions:

- Who is leading the process?
- Who needs to be involved in decisions?
- What items are important to specific family members?
- How will disagreements be handled?
- Should we get outside help or try to manage it ourselves?

“Walking into the home without these conversations almost guarantees conflict,” Laura says. *“Once you’re inside, emotions take over.”*

Clarity at the outset helps preserve relationships—especially among siblings—and prevents misunderstandings that can linger long after the work is done.

Building a Plan That Actually Works

The most effective plans start with *what families care about most* – not the rooms with the most clutter.

Start with what's visible.

Begin with known items—artwork, furniture, heirlooms—rather than immediately diving into closets or storage spaces. Starting in hidden areas often leads to exhaustion and decision fatigue before real progress is made.

Sort with purpose.

Clear categories keep the process manageable and emotionally contained. Most families benefit from using:

- Family / Keep
- Donation
- Recycle
- Shred (documents and sensitive materials)

Purposeful sorting reduces backtracking, prevents overwhelm, and helps maintain momentum through what can otherwise feel like an endless process.

Getting Professional Help: Time vs. Money

Some families know right away they want help. Others feel compelled to do the work themselves. What nearly everyone underestimates is how long this process takes.

For a typical three-bedroom home lived in for 25–30 years be prepared for the following:

- 75–100+ hours of work
- Coordination with multiple vendors (donations, dumpsters, cleaners, estate services)
- Significant physical effort and emotional strain

If you want to do the work on your own, you should plan to take time off, coordinate schedules and commit evenings and weekends over many weeks. In more complex situations—including hoarded homes—you may need to allocate months.

By comparison, using a professional team will cost more money, but can often complete the on-site work in **three to five full days**, depending on size and complexity.

Managing Distance When Family Can't Be On-Site

When families are spread across the country, making in-person coordination difficult, families can use technology to participate meaningfully from anywhere.

Common tools include:

- Live Zoom or FaceTime walkthroughs
- Recorded video reviews
- Shared digital inventories

“We’ve had five, six—even eight siblings reviewing a home together from different locations,” Laura explains.

This level of transparency reduces conflict and increases the likelihood that everyone feels informed, respected, and included.

5 Simple Steps You Can Take Now

PRINTABLE PDF:



Compassion Makes the Difference

A compassionate and comprehensive home emptying process goes far beyond removing belongings. It includes:

- Ensuring that the 'family treasures' or items of sentimental and personal value are found and preserved for the next generation.
- Locating hidden valuables such as cash, jewelry, and important documents
- Setting aside essentials like keys, remotes, and garage openers
- Respecting donation preferences
- Providing family review opportunities—on-site or virtual
- Treating the home as a life lived, not just a space to be cleared

You're not erasing a life, You're redistributing it.

Preparing the Home for Sale

When you're emptying a home with the goal of selling the property - involve a real estate professional early so that they can help can guide you on the things that will be most important in your town:

- Whether the home should be fully empty or partially staged
 - Which pieces may enhance resale value
 - Timing of final removals relative to listing and showings
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Keys to Success – Final Thoughts

Families that have the best outcomes when emptying a longtime home do three things well:

1. Have the hard conversations early
2. Respect the time and emotional weight involved
3. Don't try to do it alone

Emptying a home is never just about belongings. It's about honoring what was while preparing responsibly for what comes next. When the process is rushed or handled without support, families often carry regret long after the work is finished.

Families shouldn't have to figure this out by themselves—that's why Silver Solutions exists.

With planning, clarity, and compassion, home emptying can move from overwhelming to manageable—and even meaningful.