

The Challenge of Sentimental Items



Of all the things that occupy space in our homes, it's those with sentimental value that present the biggest organizing challenges.

Personal memorabilia, the sentimental stuff, usually evokes pleasant memories and fond feelings and it keeps us connected to our history and our past. In emotional currency, it is priceless. Yet the more we collect, the more we allow these things to intrude on our living and working space, our *space to breathe*. To illustrate, if you saved all the papers and artwork a child creates from pre-school through high school, it would fill a two-car garage! And not only do these sentimental things take up space, they often are hidden away, gathering dust – not cared-for properly or appreciated and enjoyed.

So we all need to make some hard choices about our sentimental items:

- **Be honest with yourself about what is a reasonable amount of memorabilia**, about how much space you have and about what you can take care of over time.
- **Be selective** – make sure the item touches you, makes you smile, is truly special. As professional organizer Peter Walsh says, “When everything is valuable, nothing is valuable.”
- **“Less is more”** – the less you keep, the more likely you will be to take care of it and even take it out and enjoy it.
- **Keep in mind your home and life goals** when deciding about memorabilia. Do the things you've kept take up “prime real estate” in your home, or add to clutter? Do they support you going forward, or keep you somehow tied to the past?



Know that the process of weeding out the sentimental items will stir up feelings:

- **You don't have to keep everything to honor a loved-one's memory.** As Peter Walsh also says, “This vase is not your mother. You are not throwing her away.” Be mindful of the



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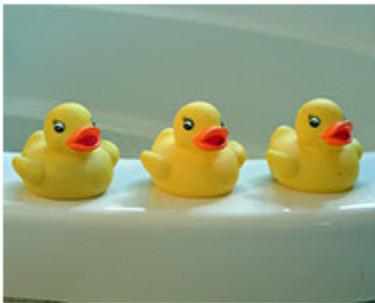
real reason why you are keeping certain things, and **don't hold on to them out of guilt or fear.**

- **Notice that in fact sometimes our personal memorabilia actually evokes negative emotions, e.g. regret, heartbreak and sadness.** Enough said?
- **Beware of "saving for your kids," "saving to give to a certain friend or relative," or even finding the "right" charity.** These can just be ways of not facing your feelings about letting no-longer-useful things go.

Here are some options when deciding what to do with sentimental items:



- **Having photos of objects can help you let go of them:** e.g. before donating, spread out your memorabilia t-shirts and photograph them. Or, if they don't "work" in your home, make sure you have photos of your parents' housewares and knick-knacks before letting them go.
- **Make something out of your memorabilia that takes up less space, or has another purpose:** e.g. create a quilt from special items of clothing, or make a digital scrapbook of pictures of your child's art.
- **Give yourself a limit:** limit each family member to one memorabilia box that is added to periodically – a keepsake bin. Review contents periodically and take out those items that have lost their meaning. Or allow only a certain number of papers and art work to be saved each year, per child.



Marie Kondo in her popular book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, encourages us to sort through our sentimental items, and keep only those that still "spark joy." She describes that by going through this process, not only will we be creating more space to breathe for ourselves, but we will also be putting our past in order and inspiring our future. (Check out my article about her book in the

Inspiration section [on my website's Advice Page.](#))

Good luck with finding the right amount of sentimental things to keep. You are not alone if you find this a hard process. When you have decided what's worth keeping, however, take care of it. Find ways to display it, or to take it out periodically and enjoy it.