

# LIVING WITH LESS

Whether moving to a smaller house or streamlining life in your current home, you can eliminate clutter with these tips from pro organizers.

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## WHAT IS RIGHTSIZING, AND HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM DOWNSIZING?

**WENDY BUGLIO** Downsizing usually refers to someone who is letting go of some amount of stuff to fit into a smaller space. When I think about rightsizing, I think about making the amount of stuff you own fit into the space you have and fit the current goals you have for the space. It's not necessarily about having less space, but it's about using the space that you have better.

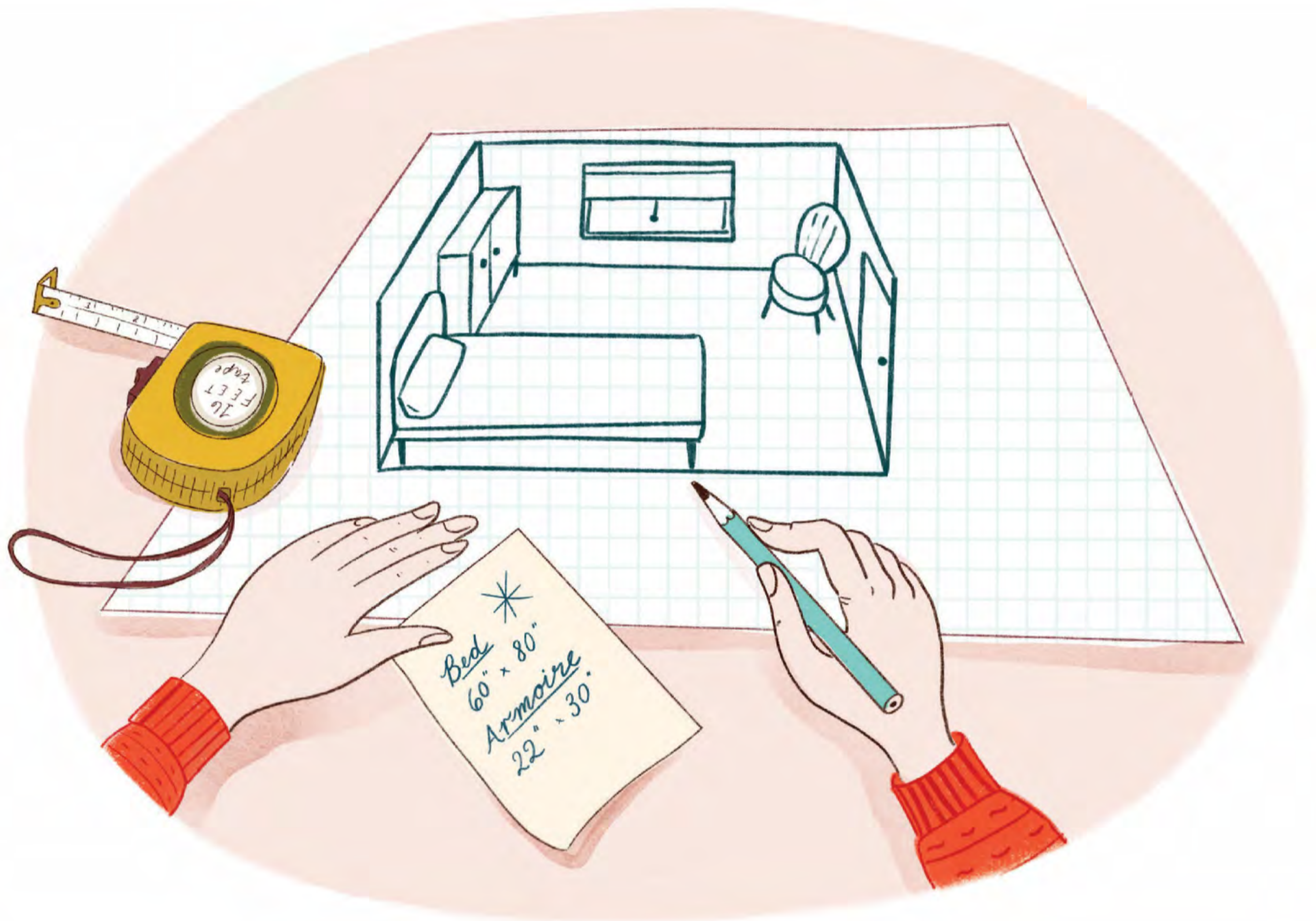
**SHARON LOWENHEIM** The goal of downsizing is to have less stuff. The goal of rightsizing is to ensure that all the stuff that one owns is used and valued. The end result might be the same. Rightsizing usually leads to downsizing, but it's about getting your stuff down to the stuff that makes sense for your life right now, not the stuff that made sense 20 years ago.

**JULIE BESTRY** Downsizing (at any stage of life) is about saying, "There are nine spatulas here and only one is any good at flipping pancakes, and most of them make it hard to close the drawer." You can use the same logic with sweaters or books or old charger cables for phones you no longer own.

**DANA ARKINZADEH** One of the big philosophies that we talk about is the idea of living by design rather than living by default. It's about using the space in a really conscious way and being mindful of having things to support your activities, hobbies, and interests.







## I'M MOVING TO A SMALLER SPACE. HOW DO I KNOW HOW MUCH I NEED TO GET RID OF?

**WENDY BUGLIO** If you have access to your new space, count the number of cabinets and drawers in the kitchen and compare that to what you have currently. If you have 30 percent fewer cabinets, you'll need 30 percent less stuff.

**DANA ARKINZADEH** The first thing to do is to figure out what furniture is coming with you. It limits how many surfaces you will have to display items. How big are the closets? How many drawers and cabinets does the kitchen have? Do you have a home office or not? This helps you understand how much the new house will hold.

**SHARON LOWENHEIM** I always draw a floor plan of the new place. Sometimes you are lucky and can get a floor plan from a Realtor, or I sketch it on graph paper. Then I have scale models of my furniture and can move them around and see what is going to fit and what's not.

**JULIE BESTRY** Once you buy a new home, the turnaround time is relatively short, so downsizing has to come before that process starts. You may not know if you are going to move into an 800-square-foot mini house or a 1,500-square-foot house. Before you think about your space, think about your lifestyle. Focus on letting go of what you don't need or want. You may be amazed that when you let go of what no longer suits you, you've already reduced more than what you would let go of if you only considered the square footage of your new home.

**DANA ARKINZADEH** It's much easier to choose what you are bringing with you than what you are getting rid of. Don't focus too much on what you are leaving behind.

**TRICIA SINON MURRAY** If things make you happy, those are the things you should keep and enjoy.

### OUR EXPERTS

**DANA ARKINZADEH**, professional organizer, DMA Organizing & Moves; Berkeley, California

**JULIE BESTRY**, professional organizer, Best Results Organizing; Chattanooga

**WENDY BUGLIO**, professional organizer, Wendy Buglio Consulting; Boston

**SHARON LOWENHEIM**, professional organizer, Organizing Goddess; New York City

**TRICIA SINON MURRAY**, professional organizer, All About Ease Organizing; Denver

Please see "Meet the Pros," page 92, for contact information.



## IT FEELS LIKE SUCH A BIG JOB TO GET RID OF STUFF I'VE COLLECTED OVER THE YEARS. HOW DO I BEGIN THE PROCESS?

**DANA ARKINZADEH** Start early... like yesterday. It's more emotional than you think it might be. You have to face a lot of evidence of the life you have led or the life you intended to live.

**WENDY BUGLIO** It's certainly a big task. Start with something you are not too emotionally invested in so you don't get discouraged from the get-go. Pick a small space or a category of things that you aren't too attached to. You might start with the linen closet.

**JULIE BESTRY** I love the linen closet because there are a lot of quick wins. Give that old itchy quilt to the animal shelter. Do one shelf of the linen closet at a time if you are working by yourself. Let go of what you don't need, and then be intentional about what you are going to need in the future.

**TRICIA SINON MURRAY** Look at your timeline for moving and chip away at your stuff. Pick a closet or start with your kitchen items. Start from the top down and go clockwise around the room. Just focus on one area at a time.

**SHARON LOWENHEIM** My favorite place to start is the kitchen because you aren't that emotional about stuff in your kitchen. You know what you use and don't use. There may be some stuff that you think you should use, or items given to you as a gift, but mostly it's pretty clear-cut. Plus, things in pantries or food cabinets have expiration dates.

**JULIE BESTRY** Start with unsentimental spaces first, such as medicine cabinets, linen closets, bathroom cabinets, kitchens, or garden sheds. Go drawer by drawer, cabinet by cabinet, shelf by shelf.

**DANA ARKINZADEH** Pick something that will set you up for success. Use a timer and dedicate enough time to make a little bit of headway, but not so much that you overwhelm yourself.



## HOW DO I AVOID FEELING OVERWHELMED AS I GO THROUGH ALL MY THINGS?

**TRICIA SINON MURRAY** I always take a deep breath and encourage my clients to do the same. Go at a pace that feels comfortable to you, and remember that it's going to look worse before it looks better, but it will be so rewarding in the end.

**DANA ARKINZADEH** Think about the projects you want to tackle and the steps involved. Then do step one on the list. It gives you some structure, and structure helps limit overwhelm.

**SHARON LOWENHEIM** Do it a little at a time. If you do 15 to 30 minutes a day, you can get a lot done in a couple of weeks. Set a timer and pick a tiny spot in one corner of the room. If the timer goes off and you've had enough, go on with the rest of your day, or set the timer again and work some more.

**JULIE BESTRY** If making decisions is difficult for you and you are feeling overwhelmed, that's when you bring in a professional organizer. We know how to presort your items. We know the processes to go through to make it easier for you to make a decision. This isn't our first rodeo.

**WENDY BUGLIO** A professional organizer can serve as a neutral third party. We are there to give you a game plan and extra hands and support throughout the process. We know who to recommend for clean-out services, and we'll have the latest information on what can be donated.

**DANA ARKINZADEH** It's OK if it feels hard. It's not a character deficit if you find organizing intimidating. There's no shame in wanting to find support to get through it.



## HOW DO I MAKE THE MOST OF SPACE IN MY SMALL HOME?

**SHARON LOWENHEIM** One of our organizing secrets in New York City is to think vertical. A 48-inch bookcase is nice, but an 84-inch bookcase is even better. If you have short furniture, add shelves above it on the wall.

**TRICIA SINON MURRAY** Be mindful of what you are putting into your spaces. If you have 30 garments that you like to hang up, you'll need 30 inches of linear space to hang those items. If you hang 50 items, it will be difficult to find the items you need for your outfit.

**JULIE BESTRY** You can use those over-the-door shoe organizers on the backs of doors for everything—cables, chargers, batteries, small dolls, doll clothes, stuffed animals, cleaning supplies, etc.

**DANA ARKINZADEH** Look for dual-function furniture. Maybe that's an ottoman with storage capability so gaming stuff can go inside when it's not in use. Make sure your coffee table has a shelf or drawers. Don't accept the default design of the closet. Minimize hanging space where it's not needed, and reimagine the closet with shelves and drawers.

**SHARON LOWENHEIM** Anything you can get with storage capability, do it. Every square inch should have some way to store something.

## WHAT DO I DO WITH ALL THE STUFF I DON'T WANT TO KEEP?

**JULIE BESTRY** You can try to sell your possessions, but this can be time-consuming and exhausting. Donating is almost always a better bet than selling unless you have actual antiques, in which case you should consult an expert appraiser.

**DANA ARKINZADEH** I'm a huge advocate of online resources like Facebook, Next Door, Freecycle, Offer Up. These are all ways to connect your stuff with other people who will use them.

**SHARON LOWENHEIM** Give it away to someone you know, if that makes it easier. Otherwise, bring it to your local Goodwill or Salvation Army—or a vintage shop if something is old.



## GET HELP WITH MOVING AND DOWNSIZING

**NAPO** The National Association of Productivity & Organizing Professionals can help you find a professional organizer in your area—or one that does online consultations. Visit [napo.net](http://napo.net) and click on “Find a Pro” to access the online directory. Some of these organizers specialize in moving and relocation.

**NASMM** Need help with your upcoming move to a smaller home? Senior move managers accredited by the National Association of Specialty & Senior Move Managers can help manage not only all aspects of your move, but also the downsizing and organizing processes too. For more information, visit [nasmm.org](http://nasmm.org).