

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Downsizing without Downgrading

The kids have flown the coup, your mate has passed on, retirement is looming or you're looking for ways to "simplify" your life: there are countless reasons for moving out of a larger home into a smaller abode. Even if you know downsizing is right for you, the thought can be a daunting one. You may worry your quality of life will suffer or that living with less may wreak havoc on your happiness. But if your lifestyle is weighing you down-physically, emotionally or financially—less truly can be more.

Downsizing Dilemmas

The decision to downsize can take years to arrive at. While reducing living space and costs may be a logical solution you may still not be emotionally prepared to accept this option. You might want to consider downsizing, however, if:

- You're having difficulty physically doing the maintenance and upkeep of your current home– cutting lawns, shovelling snow, cleaning, etc.
- You use only a few rooms in your large family home.
- Walking up and down stairs is becoming increasingly difficult.
- You're worried that your retirement fund and/or pension will not comfortably cover your housing maintenance expenses (property taxes, utilities, etc.).
- Your home is far from friends and relatives.
- You or your partner needs to be closer to medical care.

Downsizing 101

By taking a proactive, organized approach you can ensure that moving into a smaller space helps you lessen stress over finances and property maintenance while making the most of important relationships, convenience and life enjoyment. Take charge of your decision to downsize and:

Map out your needs. Before you hastily throw the "For Sale" sign up, consider where you are now and where you see yourself going. *Do you still want to entertain friends and family?* If so, you still need a large dining room and/or guest room. *Looking to move closer to family?* Examine options in your relative's neighborhood. The more carefully you assess your situation and define the kind of home and lifestyle you want, the easier it will be to make a decision you'll be happy to live with.

Consult a professional. If you haven't already, enlisting the support of a financial planner or advisor can be a great help in assessing your current financial situation and mapping out a retirement plan that will take all of your concerns and needs into consideration.

Accentuate the positive. Saying goodbye to a home that's been filled with love and laughter can be heart-breaking. But if hanging on to these memories means an emotional and/or financial burden, is it really worth it? Downsizing can greatly reduce your costs and increase your cash flow. Depending on your situation, a smaller place could mean lower heating, utility and tax bills, the ability to live mortgage-free, or the financing to do all that traveling you've always dreamed of.

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Prepare for the journey in advance. Take time out to "edit" your possessions, even if you're not planning to move for a while. Why wait to pass on that fine china tea set that's collecting dust? Pass it on now. Gradually weeding out less important or unused possessions over a few months or even years can make the whole downsizing process less overwhelming when the time actually comes to move.

Accept a few bumps in the road. Moving is considered one of life's most stressful circumstances. So when you combine this with another major life change, like retirement, you can expect some emotional and logistical turbulence along the way. When moments of stress and anxiety hit, recognize them as part of the transition process; try to stay positive and remind yourself that it takes time to adjust.

Downsizing doesn't have to mean downgrading. In fact, taking control of the process, exploring your options and mapping out a viable transition plan can be a liberating experience—a fresh chapter that lets you drop some material baggage while freeing up the time and money to enjoy life to the fullest.