

SENTIMENTAL CLUTTER GUIDE

Keep the meaning. Release the guilt.

Sentimental clutter is different from ordinary clutter.

These are the things we hold onto because they carry memories, relationships, milestones, identity, or stories that matter to us. Their value isn't necessarily in what they are; it is in what they represent.

That can make them some of the hardest things to release.

The goal isn't to get rid of everything sentimental.

The goal is to make intentional choices about what deserves a place in your life and your home.

This guide can help you work through sentimental belongings as you move through the alterations process.

T • Take Measure

Start with your why.

Before you begin, ask yourself: Why am I ready to look at these items now?

Maybe you're:

- Running out of space
- Moving or downsizing
- Helping a family member
- Going through a transition
- Feeling overwhelmed by what you've accumulated
- Ready to make your home easier to live in
- Simply ready for a change

Whatever your reason, let it be enough.

You don't need to justify wanting more space.

A • Assess

Take an honest look at what you're holding. Sentimental belongings can include:

Keepsakes, photographs, letters, journals, awards, schoolwork, gifts, souvenirs, baby items, clothing, jewelry, books, inherited belongings, family heirlooms, and items connected to loved ones or meaningful experience.

What sentimental items are taking up space in your home?

Before deciding what to do with them, simply notice what you have.

I • Identify What Matters

Separate the item from the meaning. An item's sentimental value is real; but that doesn't necessarily mean you need to keep the physical item.

Ask yourself:

- What does this item represent to me?
- What emotions come up when I see it?
- What memory or story is attached to it?
- Am I keeping the item or am I trying to keep the memory?
- Does this item support my life now?
- Is this something I genuinely want to make space for?
- Would I choose to keep this if I were making the decision today?
- Could the memory be honored in another way?

*"If everything is sentimental,
nothing is sentimental."*

– Margaret Ellison

L • Let Go

Choose what happens next. Once you've identified what matters, consider your options.

DISPLAY

Give meaningful pieces a place where you can enjoy them.

DIGITIZE

Preserve the memory without keeping the physical object.

USE

Bring sentimental items back into your everyday life.

SHARE

Give an item to someone who can carry the story forward.

REPURPOSE

Transform an item into something useful or meaningful.

RELEASE

Let the physical item go when keeping it no longer serves you.

O • Own Your Choice

You are allowed to choose differently. Sentimental clutter can bring up fear, obligation, guilt, grief, and questions about whether letting go means you're forgetting, disrespecting, or no longer valuing someone or something. It doesn't.

Releasing an object does not erase its meaning.

You can honor a person without keeping everything they gave you.

You can remember a season without keeping everything from it.

You can appreciate a gift without keeping the gift.

You can love the memory and release the object.

If you're struggling, ask:

- What am I afraid will happen if I let this go?
- Whose expectations am I carrying?
- Would I feel differently if I knew the memory could never be lost?
- What would it look like to honor this memory without keeping everything?

And if you're still not ready, that's okay. You don't have to make every decision today.

R • Reset & Maintain

Once you've made your decisions, give the sentimental items you've chosen to keep a thoughtful home.

Consider:

- Creating a dedicated memory box
- Limiting the number of items, you keep in a category
- Displaying meaningful pieces rather than storing them away
- Creating a photo book or digital archive
- Rotating seasonal or milestone items
- Giving inherited items a purpose in your current life

Your memories deserve to be honored.

They don't all have to live in your closets.

A Few Ideas for Preserving the Memory

Photographs

Create a photo book, album, or digital archive.

Children's Artwork & Schoolwork

Keep a few favorites and photograph or digitize the rest.

Baby Clothing & Special Clothing

Create a shadow box, quilt, pillow, or other meaningful keepsake.

Letters & Cards

Create an album or digitize them.

Event T-Shirts

Turn them into a quilt, pillow, tote, or another useful item—or photograph your favorites.

Awards & Trophies

Display the ones that still hold meaning and photograph the rest.

Inherited Items

Keep what genuinely connects you to the person or story. Consider sharing additional pieces with family members or organizations that may appreciate them.

Travel Souvenirs

Create a travel memory book, display a curated collection, or digitize the rest.

A Final Reminder

You are not your belongings. Your memories don't disappear because an object leaves your home. Your relationships aren't measured by what you keep. Your past can be honored without taking up all the space in your present.

Be the TAILOR of your life. Know what fits. Release what doesn't. Make room for what matters.