

A FIELD GUIDE

Six Weeks to Move Day

The adult child's field guide to emptying
a parent's home before assisted living

First edition · 2026

Not legal, financial, tax, or medical advice.

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This guide is not legal, financial, tax, or medical advice, and nothing in it should be treated as such. Where those subjects come up — deeds, appraisals, deductions, firearms, medications, a parent's capacity to decide — this guide does three things and stops: it explains what the thing is, it lists the questions worth asking, and it names the kind of professional who handles it. Decisions in those areas belong to you and to a licensed professional who knows your family's facts.

Every price, statistic, and rule in these pages carries a numbered source marker. The full list, with links, is at the back. Where the underlying sources do not agree, or do not say, this guide says so rather than filling the gap.

This guide is written for one situation: a move-in date is set, it is roughly six weeks out, and a whole house has to be dealt with before then.

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- When the resistance is something more

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Appendix A — The Document Sweep checklist

Do this before anything leaves the house. Print one copy per person searching.

Documents to find and box

- ☐ DD Form 214, if your parent served — proof of military service; reissued by the National Archives / National Personnel Records Center if missing¹⁷
- ☐ U.S. savings bonds, in any condition — set aside untouched; note that the Treasury Hunt search tool was retired as of September 30, 2025, and claims for lost, stolen, or destroyed bonds now go through the TreasuryDirect savings bond forms page¹⁸
- ☐ Deeds and property records
- ☐ Vehicle titles
- ☐ Insurance policies — life, health, long-term care, home, auto
- ☐ Birth, marriage, divorce, and death certificates
- ☐ Social Security card
- ☐ Safe-deposit box keys and the bank's name
- ☐ Bank, brokerage, and pension statements
- ☐ Uncashed checks of any age
- ☐ Tax returns
- ☐ Wills, trusts, powers of attorney, advance directives — collect, do not act; these go to the family's estate attorney
- ☐ Prepaid funeral or cemetery contracts

- [] Passwords, PIN notes, and account lists
- [] The travel folder: a small file for the medical, legal, and financial paperwork that goes with the resident^{20, 21}

Searches to run

- [] State unclaimed property, through the official state programs directory at unclaimed.org — every state your parent ever lived in, plus maiden and alternate names; MissingMoney.com is the free multi-state search managed by NAUPA¹⁹
- [] TreasuryDirect savings bond forms page, for bonds that are lost, stolen, or destroyed¹⁸

Physical places to search — all documented finds²²

- [] Toilet tanks — in the water and taped inside the lid
- [] Freezer, including inside ice trays
- [] Pantry — every cereal box, flour bag, coffee can; pour out contents if necessary
- [] Bookshelves — shake out every book; hollowed-out Bibles and dictionaries
- [] Under floorboards — loose boards under rugs, out-of-place new nails, loose carpet edges
- [] Old suitcases and trunks — linings and false bottoms
- [] Closets — every garment, pocket, lining, shoebox, cigar box
- [] Bureaus and vanities — every drawer out and turned over; envelopes taped to backs and bottoms; false-bottom drawers
- [] Backyard — buried jars; a metal detector picks up the lid
- [] Birthday cards and church envelopes

Valuables to set aside for evaluation — leave in original condition⁹

- [] Coins and currency, including jars of change, coin albums, foreign notes
- [] Jewelry and precious metals, including broken pieces and single earrings
- [] Sterling silver — flatware, trays, tea sets, candlesticks, bowls (distinguish from silver plate)
- [] Military memorabilia — medals, uniforms, insignia, documents, photographs
- [] Sports memorabilia — cards, signed items, programs, ticket stubs

The two questions to ask your parent²²

- [] "Is there anywhere in this house you kept something safe?"

- [] Ask again, in a different room, a week later.
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Appendix B — The Six-Week master checklist

Week One — Find, measure, book

- [] Document sweep, every room (Appendix A)
- [] Ask the hiding-places question
- [] Valuables box moved to a locked, ideally off-site location
- [] Get the unit floor plan with dimensions; measure the room, doorways, elevator, hallway turns
- [] Photograph the empty unit
- [] Request the facility's written prohibited-items list, resident handbook, and move-in logistics
- [] Solicit bids from several estate sale companies; schedule walkthroughs³
- [] Book the Week Six dumpster or junk-removal date
- [] Call charities and get pickup dates on the calendar for Week Four^{6, 7}
- [] Ship digitization or commit to DIY — 10–12 week standard turnaround makes this Week One only⁴
- [] Locate the local household hazardous waste program and its schedule¹⁵
- [] Call the nearest paint drop-off site to confirm type and amount¹⁶
- [] Set up staging rooms and buy supplies
- [] Decide: hiring help, or not

Week Two — Decide what moves

- [] Build the going list against the floor plan; measure every candidate piece¹⁰
- [] Conversation 2, with the floor plan on the table
- [] Pare clothing to two weeks' worth / 8–10 outfits^{20, 32}
- [] Run the family selection round on a frozen inventory¹²
- [] Pull specialist categories into the valuables box⁹
- [] Photograph closets, cupboards, and electronic hookups before dismantling²
- [] Record the story videos and photograph the pieces that are not coming^{33, 8}
- [] Freeze the going list. Put a copy on the refrigerator.