GOODBYE WITH LOVE

HOME • TRANSITION • ESTATE • LEGACY

Before you clear the house

A practical guide to protecting belongings, memories and what matters most.

For families sorting a home after a loss,
a move or a major life change.

Make space before making decisions

Sorting a home can mean holding a lifetime of memories while trying to work through a very practical list of jobs.

There may be cupboards nobody has opened in years, furniture that no longer fits, papers that need attention and ordinary things that suddenly feel impossible to part with. You may also be working around a move, a sale or a limited amount of time.

Before the focus becomes emptying rooms, it helps to pause and ask what needs to be protected, who needs to be involved and how the work can happen with care.

This is not about keeping everything

You can recognise what a home has meant and still make room for change. The aim is to give meaningful belongings and important decisions enough attention before a broader clearance begins.

Begin with the person

If the person whose belongings they are can take part, ask how they would like to be involved. Some people want to make each decision; others prefer help narrowing the choices. Offer manageable conversations rather than asking them to decide everything in one visit.

Confirm who can approve the work

Before removing, selling, donating or disposing of belongings, confirm who owns them and who can authorise decisions. Where an estate, separation or decision-making arrangement is involved, ask the relevant solicitor to clarify any uncertainty. A relative organising the work is not necessarily the person authorised to approve it.

Give yourself a workable starting point

Choose one small area, arrange some help and decide when you will stop. You can use the worksheet on page 7 to record what must be protected and what needs a decision before anyone starts clearing.

Hayley Fualau

Founder, Goodbye With Love

Identify what must be protected

Make a short list before booking a skip, arranging collections or inviting people to take belongings.

Important papers and personal information

Set aside documents that may be needed by the owner, executor or professional advisers. These may include wills, property records, financial papers, identification, insurance records and correspondence. Keep them secure and ask the appropriate adviser before discarding anything whose purpose is unclear.

Photographs and family history

Look for albums, loose photographs, letters, diaries, recipes, certificates, recordings and family research. Check envelopes, drawers and boxes before they leave. If people wish to make copies, agree who will hold the originals and how copies will be shared.

Meaningful and potentially valuable belongings

Jewellery, medals, collections, artwork and heirlooms may need specialist attention. Sentimental importance and financial value are different questions. If value is uncertain, seek an appropriate appraisal before agreeing to sell, donate or dispose of the item.

The ordinary things with a story

A favourite mug, a handmade blanket or a well-used tool can carry a connection that is not obvious to anyone else. Ask, “Is there anything here you would be upset to discover had gone?” Allow time for people to remember.

Devices and things still in use

Keep phones, computers, storage drives, keys, medication and everyday essentials separate from general clearance. Ask the appropriate person to manage personal data, accounts and safe disposal. Avoid resetting or discarding devices until access and any records needed have been considered.

Create a clearly marked “Do not remove” area, and tell every helper and provider where it is.

Make family decisions with care

People can attach very different meanings to the same object. A simple process can help prevent misunderstandings.

Ask before assuming

Invite the relevant people to identify what matters to them before the clearing date. Include relatives who live elsewhere by sharing an agreed list or arranging a video call. A request to keep an item should be recorded for consideration, rather than treated as permission to collect it.

Agree the process

Confirm who will approve allocations, how requests will be recorded and when decisions need to be made. If there are estate instructions, ownership questions or existing legal arrangements, ask the appropriate professional how the process should work.

Keep undecided items separate

Label anything disputed or uncertain as “Awaiting decision”. Record its location and leave it out of collections. Avoid asking a removalist, cleaner or clearance provider to decide who should receive an item.

Offer ways to keep the connection

With permission, photograph an object, write down its story or make copies of a recipe or letter. A family member may wish to keep a small selection rather than an entire collection. These are choices to explore, not substitutes to press on someone who wants more time.

Use a clear and kind update

An update might say: “We are sorting the spare room on Saturday. These items are being kept aside. Please let the agreed contact know about anything else that needs a decision before the collection is booked.” Share images only with the appropriate people.

Pause when the decision needs more help

If a disagreement cannot be resolved, set the item aside and seek support from the relevant adviser or an appropriate mediator. Do not let a booking deadline decide an ownership question.

A useful question: what needs to be agreed before this item leaves the home?

Sort in manageable stages

Work through a small area at a time, keeping the categories clear and the home usable.

Choose a small first task

Start with a drawer, a shelf or a type of item that feels manageable. The most emotionally significant room does not have to come first. Set a finishing time, take breaks and arrange help with lifting or anything unsafe.

Use five clear groups

- Staying in use: essentials needed until the move or handover.
- Keeping: approved items with a named destination.
- Awaiting decision: anything uncertain, disputed or needing advice.
- Leaving by agreement: items approved for sale, donation or return.
- Disposal: items approved for appropriate rubbish or recycling services.

Label the destination as well as the box

Write what is inside, where it is going and who has approved it. Keep fragile items protected and avoid placing important papers or valuables in general donation bags. Use a separate record for sensitive information rather than displaying it on boxes.

Check what can actually be accepted

Before promising donations, contact the organisation about condition, accepted items, collection and availability. Arrange an alternative if something is declined. For sale items, agree who will manage enquiries, payment, access and anything left unsold.

Leave the space safe

Keep exits and walkways clear and avoid unstable stacks. Do not disturb unknown materials, hazardous products or anything that needs specialist handling. Get suitable advice or services rather than adding it to an ordinary rubbish load.

Finish each session by recording what has been done and the next small task. You do not need to finish the whole room.

Before a collection is booked

A clear written brief helps everyone understand what is leaving, what is staying and who can approve changes.

Describe the work precisely

Ask the provider to quote for an agreed list or clearly identified areas. Confirm what is included, any exclusions, access requirements, disposal arrangements and the approach to items they cannot accept. Check who is engaging the provider and who will pay.

Protect the keep and undecided groups

Separate and label them before work begins. Give the provider a simple written instruction and walk through the home with them where possible. Make clear that “clear this room” does not override a labelled item that must stay.

Agree what happens if something is found

Ask anyone working in the home to stop and contact the agreed person if they find documents, cash, jewellery, personal records or unexpected items. Record the discovery and location without making assumptions about ownership or value.

A final check before removal

- The appropriate person has approved the items to leave.
- Relevant family requests and unresolved questions are recorded.
- Important papers, keepsakes and essentials are separated.
- Cupboards, pockets and storage areas have been checked where safe.
- The destination, collection time, access and costs are confirmed.
- Someone is available to answer questions during the work.

Close the loop afterwards

Check that protected items remain and agreed items have reached their destinations. Keep relevant receipts, approvals and records together. Note anything left behind before booking the next stage of cleaning or home preparation.

If timing is tight, prioritise a careful first check and an agreed holding area for undecided items.

Our belongings and clearance plan

Complete this together before sorting or booking services. Keep a separate detailed list if more space is needed.

Who owns the belongings, and who can authorise the work?

Our family contact, and the people who need to be consulted

What must be protected, and where will it be kept safely?

Items needing a decision

Item and location	Question or next step	Who will follow up

What is approved to leave, and where is it going?

Our next small task and the date we will check in

Care for what matters

Legacy is not about keeping everything. It is about making sure the important things are not lost in the rush to move forward.

Sometimes the most useful support is another person who can slow the process down enough to ask the right questions, then help turn those answers into a practical plan.

Goodbye With Love helps families prepare homes for sale during major life transitions. That may include a move into aged care, downsizing, a deceased estate, separation or managing a home from a distance.

How I can help

I can help identify practical priorities, plan belongings and decluttering work, and help arrange approved services, access and timing. Protecting meaningful items is part of that conversation before broader home preparation begins.

The work is shaped around what the family needs and the agreed scope. I work alongside your solicitor, selling agent and other professionals. Ownership questions, estate directions, valuations and other specialist decisions remain with the appropriate people and advisers.

Begin with a conversation

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Serving Frankston, the Mornington Peninsula and surrounding areas.

A gentle reminder

Feeling ready to sort one day and finding it difficult the next does not mean the process has gone backwards. Where circumstances allow, adjust the pace and ask for help with the parts you cannot carry alone.

This guide provides general practical information, not legal, financial or specialist valuation advice. Seek advice suited to your circumstances before decisions about ownership, distribution or disposal.

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