

Grief Notes

Dealing with Stuff by Tim Soucy, Spiritual Counselor / Bereavement Coordinator

After a loved one dies, we face natural, unavoidable, and difficult transitions. One transition we all face is the change in our relationship with our deceased loved one. The change is a shift from a relationship of presence to one of memory. I know that the previous statement may seem obvious, however, it took time for me to fully embrace the reality that my relationship with my loved ones had changed. At the beginning of my grieving, keeping my loved one's stuff somehow made me feel like my relationship had not changed even though I knew intellectually it had.

When it comes to caring for our loved one's stuff there is no "one size fits all" approach. Our unique circumstances will often dictate how much time we can take in caring for their things. For some, there will be the need to clean out an apartment, a room at a facility, or to prepare a home for sale as quickly as possible. Other constraints may be geographic, family, employment, and other responsibilities that are a part of life. For some, circumstances and present life situations will allow more time to go through everything.

Family members will often have differing opinions on how much time should be taken going through stuff, what to do with it, and who should get certain items. Much of the time these differing opinions are impacted by the ways people



grieve and the depth of their own grief. It is difficult enough to go through their loved one's stuff and when there are different opinions this will only increase that difficulty.

Here are some suggestions on how to cope with our loved one's possessions:

- Be kind to yourself and understand that life circumstances will impact the way you manage your loved one's stuff.
- Separate items by what you want to keep, items to give to family or friends, and items you want to donate to a charity or good cause.
- Take a photo and let it go.
- Scan photos and place scanned photos in a digital picture frame instead of stored or collecting dust somewhere.
- Allow yourself a limited collection of sentimental objects that create space for you to remember your loved ones.

Holding on to things is one way we try to hold on to the person who has died and that can be a strong felt need. Letting go of items can be hard and it may feel like we are throwing a bit of that person away or are feeling ok with letting them go. We can struggle with getting rid of items.

While writing this article, I have become profoundly aware of the many photos, trinkets, books, and items I have in my office from deceased loved ones. They continue to trigger memories of my loved ones. Holding some possessions close can aid in our holding on to loved ones and so can letting some things go. There is no "one size fits all" approach in going through our loved one's stuff. We each find our own way.