

Create Your Emotional Box

When you're going through your stuff and making decisions about what to keep and what to release, it's likely you'll come across some emotionally loaded items.

It's not surprising that the love letters from the spouse who left you are likely to stir up big feelings. It's even somewhat understandable that it's a struggle to figure out what to do with the ceramic frog collection you used to love. But why in the world would that shampoo bottle under the bathroom sink bring tears to your eyes? Why are you feeling stuck and staring at a little plastic toy nobody wants or needs? Why can't you just quickly decide to get rid of that sweater full of holes?

When there aren't obvious reasons to explain your emotions, they can seem mystifying and even ridiculous. But emotions don't come from the world of logic. You may not be conscious of the associations and meanings certain objects and papers hold for you. That's why your clutter session can get so quickly derailed when you come upon an emotionally charged item. One moment you're efficiently deciding about one thing after another. The next you're swamped with feelings.

I take a gentle approach to clutter clearing. I don't encourage you to force a decision. I also don't recommend that you

interrupt your sorting process to start unpacking big emotions. It's not a time to read those love letters or reminisce about good times you had while wearing that sweater. Just get whatever it is into a box labeled EMOTIONAL as quickly as possible. Then bring your attention back to sorting and making decisions about the items that are less emotionally fraught.

When you reach the closure step of your session, take another look at anything that ended up in your EMOTIONAL box. You may notice that you feel clearer about some of the items.

Refraining from making decisions before you're ready can give you room to relax and feel safe. That, in turn, can create space for you to do some inner sorting, while outwardly you continue to process other items.

When you come back to the things that previously felt too overwhelming, you might have more clarity. You might find yourself saying, *"Oh, I definitely want to keep that."* Or you may say, *"You know, I think I'd feel just fine about saying goodbye to that."*

Some objects might still feel too emotionally loaded for you to make decisions about. That's fine. Put those items back into the EMOTIONAL box and put a date on it. Then schedule a time in your calendar to revisit the box and its contents. Be sure that any emotional processing you do has

its own time, separate from efficient sorting and practical information gathering.

Possible Actions

- Make a list of the kinds of items that would be likely to end up in your EMOTIONAL box. If any of them relate to or represent past chapters or endings in your life, make a note of that.
- Check out the writings in Chapter Seven of this book. They offer additional suggestions and writing prompts for processing emotionally loaded objects.