

How to Properly Liquidate a Loved One's Home

When a loved one will no longer be returning to their home the family needs to secure the assets of their loved one in the newly abandoned home.

The family has a number of responsibilities, among those are:

1. Immediately secure the contents from outside parties by changing the locks. You have no idea who has keys to the home; the yard man, the neighbor, a friend, etc. - especially with dementia patients. Those individuals may take advantage of their absence to take certain valuables out of the home which now need to be used for the individual's care. The locks should be changed even for short term rehabilitation or hospital stays.
2. Remove all gold and precious stone jewelry from the home. Thieves typically target the jewelry boxes when they break in.
3. Remove all small valuable items such as gold pocket watches, sterling silver flatware and other items of value and secure in another location.
4. Have an appraiser identify all items of significant value within the home that should be transferred to a more secure location.

After securing the assets the family needs to look for the money in the home. Many seniors tend to hide money in the home. Sometimes it is just a few hundred dollars hidden away as mad money. However some are money hoarders who hide thousands of dollars within the home.

A. Start the search in the bedroom closet. Check the clothes pockets, especially the inside pockets of coats and jackets. Make sure nothing is sewn in linings. Check shoe boxes, tips of shoes, old purses, zippered compartments, etc.

1. **Check dressers.** The top drawers are commonly used as change holders, but sometimes you will find significant money in the dressers. Pull out the bottom drawer to make sure things have not fallen down there. Victorian era furniture often has a secret compartment beneath the bottom drawer which you will also need to check.
2. **Beds:** Between the mattress and box springs is a common hiding place. However don't forget to unzip the pillowcases and pillows to search for hidden money.

B. Search the rest of the home: If you find significant money in the bedroom then you will have to search the house.

1. **The living room:** This is not normally a major hiding place because it is a high traffic area for people from the outside. But check the seat cushions in chairs, and sofas.
2. **The kitchen:** Check cookie jars, false bottom cans, bowls, plastic containers. The freezer is sometimes a hiding place. Make sure the meat wrapped in aluminum foil is actually meat and not money. Check ice cube trays for frozen jewelry and coins.
3. **Floor air vents.** If the house has floor air vents, make sure money or jewelry is not hidden in a container within the air vent.

4. **Library:** If there is a library make sure the books are not being used to hide money. Fake box books, hidden compartments in books or just money hidden in pages may be found.
5. **Family rooms, closets, bedrooms.** If you have found significant hidden money all these areas need to be checked. Make sure you check blanket chests. Often money or other valuables are hidden wrapped up in blankets in the bottom of blanket chests.
6. **Garage:** Money, coin collections etc. can be stored in the garage. If you find canning jars with money in the garage you will have to rent a metal detector to check the back yard for buried treasure.

C. Search for documents

1. **Legal documents, documents related to home and auto, asset paperwork.** Tax returns - to review for hidden income or asset sources you may not have found.
2. **Historical documents or documents that you think may be worth something.** If it is old hold on to it until an appraiser can review to determine value.
3. **Letters from famous people:** Make sure your relative did not correspond with someone famous. Read the letters.
4. **Provenance documents:** These are documents and receipts that prove how items were obtained. If it is a receipt for sale of art from a prestigious gallery or a bill of sale from someone it may prove the item is genuine. A letter from decedents may shed light as to age or origin of certain valuable items.

Have a certified personal property appraiser who is familiar with antiques conduct a walkthrough of the home to identify items of unusual value that you need to secure. An appraiser is prohibited from offering to buy or buying anything according to the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice. Make sure the appraiser is not in the antique business and will not make offers to buy before you hire to conduct a walkthrough. A walkthrough should cost less than \$200.

When you liquidate items of unusual value make sure:

1. You know the approximate market value of the item.
2. If you use a professional estate liquidator they should not purchase items nor should they be in the antique business. Make sure they liquidate through auctions throughout the country, rather than sell to dealers and friends The more people who have a chance to purchase the item the better your return will be.
3. Use an experienced estate sale company which is not in the antique business to liquidate the low end items at an on site sale to maximize your revenue from the sale of home contents. They can also do invitation sales in condo and gated communities which do not allow sales. The average home has between \$6,000 and \$12,000 of household contents, so liquidating through an estate sale professional instead of donating makes financial sense.