Think Before Landfill

Simple Steps. Lasting Impact.



Deceased Estate

Where Do I Start?

A compassionate, practical guide to sorting belongings, making decisions and finding alternatives to landfill.

FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE | SOUTH AUSTRALIAN STARTING POINTS

A THOUGHTFUL PLACE TO BEGIN

You do not have to do this all at once



Losing someone is difficult enough. Then comes the task of walking through their home, opening cupboards and deciding what should happen to a lifetime of possessions. A familiar chair, a recipe book or a photograph can bring back powerful memories.

Some families have weeks or months to work through belongings. Others face urgent practical deadlines. There may be disagreement, fatigue, distance or uncertainty about what is legally permitted. However you feel, it is reasonable to take a measured approach.

What this booklet can help you do

- Understand the first safeguards before moving estate belongings.
- Break down a house clearance into smaller, manageable tasks.
- Recognise items that may be valuable, sentimental or reusable.
- Explore donation, resale, repair and recycling before landfill.
- Keep an organised record using printable checklists.

A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This is general information, not legal, financial or counselling advice. The executor or legally authorised administrator should approve decisions about estate belongings. Where the position is unclear, seek estate-specific advice.

AUTHORITY AND ESTATE PROPERTY

Who can make the decisions?

Before anything leaves the property, establish who is responsible for the estate. In South Australia, the executor named in a valid Will generally has duties to identify, protect and administer estate assets. Where there is no Will, an administrator may need to be appointed. Probate or letters of administration may be relevant depending on the circumstances.

PROTECT THE ESTATE

Do not sell, distribute, donate or discard belongings simply because they appear unwanted. Confirm the authority to act, record the decision and seek professional advice if there is any dispute or uncertainty.

Practical safeguards

- Locate the most recent original Will and record who holds it. Do not attach, staple or mark the original.
- Protect the home: keys, locks, insurance, utilities and urgent safety concerns may need attention.
- Create an inventory of furniture, valuables, personal effects and items requiring investigation.
- Identify belongings that may be jointly owned, borrowed, held for another person or specifically mentioned in the Will.
- Keep records of photographs, estimates, decisions, receipts and who authorised each action.
- If heirs or family members disagree, pause disputed decisions and obtain appropriate advice.

Useful starting point: Public Trustee SA, “I’ve been named as executor — where do I start?”
publictrustee.sa.gov.au/wills-executors-trusts/executors/where-to-start

SAFETY, PAPERWORK AND NOTES

The first practical visit



You can prepare without rushing decisions

- Arrange access with the appropriate person and identify any immediate security issues.
- Look for important correspondence and documentation; keep private records secure.
- Photograph rooms and storage areas before rearranging items, if appropriate.
- Record urgent obligations such as an agreed handover or property inspection date.
- Identify health and safety hazards without disturbing suspicious materials.
- Keep jewellery, cash, collections and important documents protected and documented.

SAFETY FIRST

Do not open unknown containers of chemicals or disturb possible asbestos. Do not handle needles or unsafe electrical items without appropriate professional assistance. If the premises are unsafe, stop and seek help.

A first visit does not have to be a clearance day. Even taking photographs, writing down questions and agreeing who will do what can make later steps easier.

MAKE THE TASK MANAGEABLE

A room-by-room approach

Work in short sessions where possible. Many people find it easier to begin with a practical space such as a laundry or storage cupboard and leave emotionally significant areas until they have more time and support.

Seven useful sorting labels

- Keep: property retained according to authorised directions.
- Investigate: ownership, value, personal significance or disposal pathway uncertain.
- Sell: items approved for sale, potentially with a valuation first.
- Donate: suitable goods approved for donation and accepted by the recipient.
- Repair or reuse: items that could have a second life.
- Recycle: accepted materials going to an appropriate collection point.
- Disposal: genuine residual waste once alternatives have been checked.

KEEP DECISIONS TRACEABLE

These labels are organisational tools, not permission to distribute or dispose of estate assets. Record approvals before items are removed.

Try a gentle working rhythm

Choose one space, set an achievable goal and plan a break. If an item causes strong emotions, move it to the “Investigate” group. You can come back to it when the decision feels clearer.

SENTIMENTAL, PERSONAL AND POTENTIALLY VALUABLE

What deserves a second look?



An item can matter for more than one reason. A chipped mixing bowl may be an important family memory; an ordinary-looking cabinet or tool may have resale value. Avoid assuming age automatically means rubbish — or that age automatically means financial value.

Items to flag before clearance

- Photographs, letters, diaries, recipes, certificates and family records.
- Jewellery, watches, coins, stamps, artworks and collectables.
- Furniture, musical instruments, vintage tools and specialist equipment.
- Military and sporting memorabilia, medals and awards.
- Computers, phones and digital storage that may contain private information.
- Items identified in the Will or claimed by beneficiaries.

WHEN TO INVESTIGATE

For an item with uncertain value, ask an appropriate valuer, dealer or auctioneer. Do not photograph or publish private documents or identifying records without considering privacy.

WHAT COULD BE REUSED?

Furniture, household goods and textiles



Furniture

Solid timber pieces, tables, chairs and storage furniture might be sold, donated, repaired or passed on. Check condition, measurements and whether the receiving organisation can collect. Some organisations cannot accept damaged, upholstered or oversized items.

Clothing and linen

Clean, wearable clothing and usable linen may be suitable for donation. Check donation criteria first and avoid leaving bags outside charity premises. Stained or damaged textiles are not necessarily suitable for charity resale; ask about specific textile recycling programs.

Books, records and kitchenware

Some books and record collections are suitable for specialist dealers; everyday kitchenware can be useful to community organisations or second-hand retailers. Confirm acceptance and whether the recipient wants a large mixed collection.

A useful phone call

ASK BEFORE LOADING THE CAR

“I’m helping with an authorised estate clearance. We have [type and quantity of goods] in [suburb]. Do you accept these items? Do they need to be clean or working? Is collection available, and are there any fees?”

FINDING SPECIALIST OPTIONS

Appliances, mattresses and e-waste

White goods and appliances

A safe, functional appliance may have a second life through sale, donation or reuse. For broken appliances, ask an authorised e-waste or metal recycler whether they accept that specific model. Fridges and air-conditioners may require appropriate refrigerant handling; do not attempt to remove refrigerant yourself.

Mattresses

Mattress acceptance varies by council and provider. Contact the local council or resource recovery centre about collection or transfer-station arrangements, fees, booking requirements and whether a specialist recycling option is available.

Computers, phones and small electricals

Protect personal information before any device is transferred or recycled. Seek help with data removal where needed. Do not place e-waste or embedded batteries into an ordinary kerbside recycling bin.

Before booking a pickup

- Confirm what is accepted and whether extra handling fees apply.
- Ask whether the item must be moved to the kerb, driveway or front door.
- Ask about stairs, access restrictions and whether collection staff can lift safely.
- Keep written confirmation of collection where possible.

SAFETY MATTERS

Batteries, paint and difficult waste

Household batteries do not belong in South Australian kerbside bins or hard-waste collections. They can cause fires when damaged or crushed. Tape exposed terminals and follow current storage and collection advice for the specific battery type.

A safer disposal pathway

- Separate loose batteries from ordinary waste. Keep them away from metal items, heat and children.
- Use a suitable B-cycle or council collection point for accepted portable batteries.
- Check separately for swollen, damaged, leaking, embedded, automotive or large lithium batteries. Contact the accepting facility before travel.
- Keep paints, solvents, pesticides, gas cylinders and unidentified chemicals separate. Do not pour them into drains or mix them.
- Ask your council or an approved hazardous-waste facility how to handle each material safely.

FIRE AND CHEMICAL RISK

Do not put batteries in the yellow, green or general-waste bins. For damaged lithium batteries or unknown hazardous material, avoid handling and obtain specialised advice.

Official guidance: Which Bin SA — batteries · Which Bin SA — chemicals and paint · B-cycle

QUESTIONS TO ASK SERVICE PROVIDERS

Selling, donating or booking clearance



Once the authorised person has decided which items may leave, compare practical options. It may be convenient for one service to clear everything, but make sure you understand what happens to reusable items and who bears any fees.

Ask before agreeing

- Is the quote written and itemised, and what exclusions apply?
- Are labour, transport, stairs, loading, tipping and specialist disposal covered?
- What happens to furniture or metal that can be reused or sold?
- Can you provide receipts for donations, payments and disposal?
- How will valuables, paperwork or items held back be protected?
- What insurance or licences are relevant to this particular job?
- Can the collection take place only after estate approval is recorded?

CHOOSE WITH CONFIDENCE

Think Before Landfill helps visitors explore options; inclusion in a directory should not be interpreted as an endorsement. Independently check suitability, prices, insurance and service availability.

STAGES RATHER THAN A FIXED FOUR-WEEK TIMELINE

A workable plan, not a deadline

Estate administration can take time, and a family may need to wait for probate, information, valuations or agreement. Treat the stages below as a flexible planning tool rather than a legal or emotional timetable.

Stage 1 — Protect and understand

- Confirm authority and identify immediate safety or security issues.
- Locate the Will and relevant documents; protect assets.
- Record deadlines, contacts and questions.

Stage 2 — Inventory and separate

- Photograph and list possessions as appropriate.
- Set aside valuables, documents, memories and uncertain items.
- Discuss approvals, valuations and family sensitivities.

Stage 3 — Choose the pathways

- Research sale, donation, reuse, recycling and disposal routes.
- Confirm item acceptance, prices and access arrangements.
- Record approvals and book authorised services.

Stage 4 — Check and close out

- Keep receipts, payments and disposal records.
- Review rooms and check for overlooked belongings.
- Confirm keys, property handover and any remaining obligations with the responsible person.

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Checklist 1 · First steps

- [ ] Confirm who is authorised to administer the estate.
- [ ] Locate and protect the original Will and key documents.
- [ ] Check security, insurance and immediate property risks.
- [ ] Record essential contacts, dates and deadlines.
- [ ] Identify cash, jewellery, valuables and significant collections.
- [ ] Arrange a household contents inventory and photographs.
- [ ] Check which items need valuation or ownership clarification.
- [ ] Identify items specifically mentioned in the Will.
- [ ] Agree on a safe sorting method and a place for uncertain items.
- [ ] Seek estate-specific advice if there are disputes or legal uncertainties.

Notes and contacts

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Checklist 2 · Room-by-room

For each space, record progress and keep the separate inventory or decision record. Tick only after the authorised person has approved removal or distribution.

- [ ] Entry, hallways and cupboards reviewed.
- [ ] Living room and dining room reviewed.
- [ ] Kitchen, pantry and laundry reviewed.
- [ ] Bedrooms and wardrobes reviewed.
- [ ] Bathroom and medicine storage reviewed safely.
- [ ] Study, paperwork and digital devices reviewed.
- [ ] Garage, shed and workshop reviewed safely.
- [ ] Garden, outdoor storage and bulky items reviewed.
- [ ] Valuables, memories and uncertain items set aside.
- [ ] Sale, donation, recycling and disposal pathways confirmed.
- [ ] Collections documented, with receipts where relevant.

Items to investigate or hold back

A DECISION RECORD YOU CAN PRINT

Checklist 3 · What happens to each item?

Use this page alongside the estate inventory. Enter only authorised decisions, and keep additional records where the estate requires them.

ITEM / ROOM	KEEP / HOLD	DESTINATION	APPROVED BY

Remember: Record who approved the decision, the date, any payment or receipt, and the address or service used. Do not record sensitive identity or banking details on forms that may be shared.

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Checklist 4 · Collection and handover

- [ ] Confirm who has authorised the clearance or collection.
- [ ] List the items the provider may and may not remove.
- [ ] Photograph agreed items and any property access concerns.
- [ ] Receive and review the written quote or service terms.
- [ ] Confirm fees, specialist charges and payment arrangements.
- [ ] Check whether usable goods are separated for reuse.
- [ ] Confirm hazardous material and battery exclusions.
- [ ] Agree on appointment time, vehicle access and lifting arrangements.
- [ ] Retain receipts, donation acknowledgements and disposal records.
- [ ] Conduct a final walk-through with the appropriate person.

Booking details

Provider / contact: _____

Date / time: _____

Agreed price / inclusions: _____

Items excluded: _____

Receipts and follow-up: _____

TRUSTED INFORMATION AND NEXT STEPS

Where to find more help

These are general starting points for South Australian readers. Conditions, locations and fees may change; always check the current guidance and contact the service before visiting.

Public Trustee South Australia

Executor responsibilities, assets and first steps

publictrustee.sa.gov.au/wills-executors-trusts/executors/where-to-start

Which Bin South Australia

Guidance on battery recycling and specialist waste

www.whichbin.sa.gov.au/

Recycle Right South Australia

A–Z of household items and disposal pathways

www.recycleright.sa.gov.au/a-z-items

B-cycle

Accredited drop-off options for accepted batteries

bcycle.com.au/

SIMPLE STEPS. LASTING IMPACT.

Think Before Landfill is a free information resource. We aim to make it easier to explore reuse, donation and recycling before sending things to landfill. Visit thinkbeforelandfill.com for resources and a developing directory.

Editorial note: Prepared October 2026. General educational information only; not a substitute for independent legal, environmental safety or grief-support advice. Some opportunities and programs vary by council and service.