

Planning for Tomorrow

First Steps to Take to Prepare for Tomorrow

None of us likes to think about our own death, but it is inevitable. When this time comes for us, someone will be left behind to take care of the financial and legal steps that must be taken. Having the necessary information and documents easily accessible for family members and perhaps a close friend or neighbor will lessen the stress and make their tasks easier.

The following documents were compiled as a guide to help you gather information and to be better prepared to take the required financial and legal steps necessary at the time of a death.

This document should not take the place of having an attorney, but it will help you gather information and have it available when the time comes.

Part 1 Preparing and Organizing Necessary Information

- Definitions
- General Information Questionnaire
- Estate Planning Information for your Attorney
- Important Documents and Where to Locate Them
- Advisors and Organizations to Contact
- Biographic Information for an Obituary
- Personal Requests for Funeral Arrangements

Part 2 First Steps to Take When a Loved One Dies

- What to Do Immediately
- What to Do Before the Funeral
- What to Do After the Funeral

Be sure to check with an attorney if you have property in other states, as these laws vary. We hope you will find questionnaires and lists helpful as you organize important papers and information that will be needed at the time of your death.

After compiling this information, please make sure someone knows where this set of documents can be found.

Part 1 Planning for Tomorrow

WHAT IS A WILL? A Will is a legal document that states your desires concerning what will happen to your assets after your death. A Will also contains other specific directions from you concerning who is to handle administration of your estate and, perhaps, who will care for any minor children you may leave behind.

WHY SHOULD I MAKE A WILL? If you die without a valid Will, the laws of your state of legal residence determine what happens to your assets, and who will care for your minor children. Your wishes will not be considered, so that your assets and minor children may go where you don't want them to go.

ARE ALL OF MY ASSETS CONTROLLED BY MY WILL WHEN I DIE? No. Many assets are controlled outside of the Will. For example, proceeds of life insurance policies and retirement plan assets are distributed as you direct in a beneficiary designation form, and a bank account or house that you own jointly with another person will go to the other joint owner if owned with rights of survivorship. It is extremely important that you coordinate the disposition of these assets with the disposition of the assets of your estate, as provided for in your Will.

WHAT IS PROBATE? Probate is a court procedure by which a Will is proved to be valid or invalid, and a personal representative is appointed to handle the estate administration. The probate process gives your creditors an opportunity to be paid from your assets and then transfers the remainder of your assets from your name to your beneficiaries under your Will or according to the laws of your state if you should die without a Will. The Clerk of Superior Court oversees the estate administration, and requires an accounting of assets passing through the estate.

WHAT IS A POWER OF ATTORNEY? A Power of Attorney is a legal document whereby you give someone the power to act on your behalf, usually with respect to finances or health care matters.

For more detailed information, refer to the free pamphlets that the North Carolina Bar Association publishes "Living Wills and Health Care Powers of Attorney" and "Protecting Your Assets: Wills, Trusts, and Powers of Attorney"

General Information Questionnaire

Date: _____

Your Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Partner's/Spouse's Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Address: _____

Contact Information: Phone: _____ Email: _____

Marital Status: _____

Living Children:

Full Name: _____ *Age:* _____

Place of Residence: _____

Full Name: _____ *Age:* _____

Place of Residence: _____

Full Name: _____ *Age:* _____

Place of Residence: _____

Guardianship: A Guardian is someone appointed to care for the well-being of minor children if both parents are deceased. You can name one person or multiple persons as co-guardians.

Name and Contact Information: _____

Alternate or Successor Guardian? _____

Do you wish to leave gifts to your children outright or in trust? Yes No

If in trust, at what ages would you want the trust(s) to terminate and have the trust property distributed outright? _____

If your child were to predecease you or die before reaching the age for distribution of property from trust, would you like his/her share to be distributed equally among your other children or would you like his/her share to go to his/her children? _____

Do you wish to provide for you children equally or is there a child or children for whom you wish to provide for differently?

**Other Considerations in Estate Planning
Information Your Attorney May Need**

Gifts and Distributions

Beneficiaries

Name: _____
Age: _____ Relationship: _____
Contact Info: _____

Name: _____
Age: _____ Relationship: _____
Contact Info: _____

Charitable Beneficiaries

Name: _____
Location: _____
Special Purpose: _____

Name: _____
Location: _____
Special Purpose: _____

Executor of Your Will

Primary: _____
Alternate or Successor: _____

Trustee

This person will handle trust assets for minor children if both parents are deceased.

Special Family Circumstances, Problems, or Other Concerns

Durable Financial Power of Attorney

This document names an individual and an alternate individual to handle your finances should you become unable to handle them yourself, whether temporarily or permanently. Without this document, your spouse or other named individual will face difficulty in handling your financial affairs in the event you are unable to handle them. Do this for both you and your spouse.

Your Full Name: _____

First Choice: Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact information: _____

Second Choice: Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact information: _____

Durable Financial Power of Attorney (continued)

Spouse's Full Name: _____

First Choice: Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact information: _____

Second Choice: Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact information: _____

Healthcare Power of Attorney

A Healthcare Power of Attorney is a document similar to the Financial Power of Attorney, the difference being the named Agent serves in the role of making healthcare decisions for you if you are unable to make them yourself.

Your Full Name: _____

First Choice: Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact information: _____

Second Choice: Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact information: _____

Healthcare Power of Attorney (Continued)

Spouses's Full Name: _____

First Choice: Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact information: _____

Second Choice: Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact information: _____

Living Will

This document is known as an Advanced Directive and clearly states ahead of time what differing methods of life support and nutrition and hydration you desire in the event you are incapacitated in varying degrees. Without this document, you family members will be left to make decisions on their own and may face obstacles with healthcare personnel. An Attorney will help you create this document.

Will you be an organ or body donor? _____

Important Documents

Have copies of these documents together in a place where someone knows where to find them if needed. If the originals are located elsewhere, make notes of where these originals are and keep the list updated.

Description	Location / Contact Information
The Essentials	
Your Will / Trusts	_____

Estate Planning Documents	_____

Letter of Instruction	_____

Social Security Card	_____

Life Insurance and Retirement	
Life Insurance Policies	_____

IRAs	_____

401 k	_____

Pension Documents	_____

Annuity Contracts	_____

Proof of Ownership	
Stocks/Bonds/Brokerage Accounts	_____

Property Insurance Documents	_____

Housing and Deeds to Land	_____

Escrow Mortgage Accounts	_____

Vehicle Titles	_____

Proof of Loans and Debts	_____

Partnership/Corporate Agreements	_____

Tax Returns	_____

Bank Accounts

List of Bank Accounts with
Usernames / Passwords _____

Personal Information

Birth Certificates _____

Children’s Birth Certificates _____

Marriage Certificate _____

Divorce Papers _____

Military Papers _____

Health Care Confidential

Personal/Family Medical History _____

Durable Healthcare Power of Atty _____

Authorization to Healthcare Info _____

Living Will _____

Do Not Resuscitate Order _____

Funeral Arrangements

Funeral Arrangement Documents _____

Cemetery Plots _____

Clergy/Religious Representative _____

Newspaper to be Notified _____

Military Contact information _____

Safe Deposit Box

Bank and Location of Box(s) _____

Location of Key _____

Individuals Authorized to Open Box:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Advisors and Organizations to Contact

Attorney: Estate Planning

Attorney: Other

Investment Advisor/Stockbroker

Banks

Family/ Friends to Contact

Biographical Information for a Death Certificate

This form includes a list of information that is required in order to complete a death certificate. Please try to keep this form updated. This is a useful tool for the ease of your loved ones after you passing.

Complete Legal Name: _____

Gender: Male Female **U.S. Citizen :** Yes No **Armed Forces:** Yes No

Birthdate: (Month, Day, Year) _____ **Ethnic Origin:**

City and State of Birth: _____

Marital Status: Married Never Married Widowed Divorced

Marriage Date: _____ **Marriage Location:** _____

Social Security Number: _____

Education: Highest grade completed: _____

Occupation: _____

Type of Industry: _____

Residence Address: _____

_____ **County:** _____

Name of Spouse: (include maiden name) _____

Father's Name: _____

Mother's Name: (include maiden name) _____

To be Completed after Death:

Date of Death (Month, Day, Year) _____

Age at Last Birthday in Years: _____ **City of Death:** _____

County of Death _____ **Length of Residence in County:** _____

Personal Requests for Funeral for your Church or Funeral Home

Your Name: _____

Do you wish to be buried or cremated? Buried Cremated

Place of burial or interment of ashes: _____

Church from which you will be buried: _____

Officiating Clergy: _____

Preacher of homily: _____

Readers: _____

Acolyte: _____

Ushers: _____

Pallbearers: _____

Organist: _____

Would you like the choir if possible: _____

Hymns: _____

Prayer Book: Rite I or Rite II

Holy Eucharist? Yes No Eucharistic Prayer A, B, C, or D ?

Lessons and Psalm: _____

Funeral Home: _____

Memorial Gifts: _____

Signature: _____ Date _____

(See next page for additional information requested)

Personal Requests for Funeral: Vital Statistics

Full Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City and State: _____

Phone: Home: _____ Cell: _____

Marital Status: _____ Spouse: _____

Birthplace: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Father's Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Mother's Maiden Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Length of Residence here: _____ Prior Residence: _____

Occupation: _____ Veteran: Yes No

Social Security Number: _____

Religion: _____ Church: _____

Clubs/Organizations, Interests: _____

Remarks: _____

Persons to be Notified

Relationship	Name	Address/Phone

Planning for Tomorrow Part 2

The First Steps to Take When a Loved One Dies

The emotional trauma that follows the death of a close family member is often accompanied by confusion and bewilderment about the financial and legal steps the survivors must take. Locate the preliminary questionnaire you previously completed which will aid you in the steps ahead. The following checklist is provided to make your task easier. This checklist is broken down into 3 categories:

- To Do Immediately
- To Do Before the Funeral
- To Do After the Funeral

Don't try to handle everything yourself if you don't have to. When friends offer to help, take advantage of this and delegate. As you review this list, consider what items you can hand off and who can best handle them.

TO DO IMMEDIATELY

() ORGAN/BODY DONATION (if appropriate)

Arrangement for organ donation needs to be made almost immediately after death so the organs can be harvested as promptly as possible. The driver's license or advance health care directive (living will or health care proxy) are sources to check for this. If the loved one has died in a hospital, there will be a transplant coordinator to guide you through the process. If the death takes place somewhere else, contact the nearest hospital.

If the person made arrangements to donate his or her body to a medical school, the contact and process information should also be a part of the health care directive.

() CONTACT IMMEDIATE FAMILY/CLERGY

Update key family members. Bringing them together in person, by phone or electronically is an opportunity for them to comfort one another and to share information about important decisions that need to be made concerning the funeral, etc. This is especially helpful if the loved one left no advance instructions or possibly made an unreasonable request. Notify your clergy as soon as possible. He can be a great resource as you make these plans.

() **LOCATE ESTATE PLANNING DOCUMENTS**

Find the will, all trusts, and any other estate planning documents. Often they are kept in a safe deposit box, home safe or among your loved one's important papers including insurance policies, contracts, car titles, bank/investment statements, etc.

() **CHOOSE A FUNERAL HOME**

The funeral home will provide transportation for the loved one to its facility and funeral preparation. Some people have made these arrangements in advance and even prepaid for funeral services. The majority have not and the choices will be up to the family. Check with family and friends who have had this experience for their recommendations. Factors to consider: What did the loved one want? What can you afford? What is realistic? What will help the family most?

() **NOTIFY CLOSE FRIENDS AND EXTENDED FAMILY**

Make a list of as many people as you can. Find contacts through email accounts, personal phone contact lists, etc. Contact his/her employer and any organizations the loved one belonged to, if appropriate.

() **SECURE PROPERTY**

Make sure the person's home and vehicle are locked and that the car is parked in a secure and legal area. If the home will be vacant, notify the police, landlord or property manager. Make arrangements for someone to care for any pets until a permanent plan is decided.

() **POST OFFICE**

Have all mail forwarded to the appropriate person/address. This will prevent accumulating mail from attracting attention. The mail that comes in will be very valuable in tracking down contacts you may not have thought of. It can provide a wealth of information.

TO DO BEFORE THE FUNERAL

() MEET WITH YOUR CLERGY AND/OR THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Use the instructions your loved one might have left and the earlier family discussion to guide the many decisions to be made.

Questions to be considered:

When and where will the service be held?

Will the body be embalmed or cremated?

Will there be a casket? If so, will it be open or closed?

Will there be a burial and where?

If the body is to be cremated, will the ashes be scattered?

If the ashes are to be placed in an urn, will it be placed in a mausoleum?

Are there religious traditions to be followed?

Are there military/veteran ceremonial rites to be included?

Will there be contributions to charities in lieu of flowers? If so, which charities?

() SOCIAL SECURITY

Call Social Security Administration at (800) 772-1213 and notify them of the death. If your loved one was receiving benefits, they must stop because overpayments will require complicated repayment. Even a payment received for the month of death may need to be returned. Check with them for eligibility of Social Security death benefits, as well as for information on increased personal benefits for you and other heirs for which you may be eligible.

() VETERANS

Inquire about benefits. You may be able to get assistance with the funeral, burial plot or other benefits. Details are available at the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs website, call Veterans Affairs at (800) 827-1000 or contact your local veterans agency. You can also inquire about veteran's survivors (spouse and heirs) benefits which may include pension payments and financial aid for education expenses.

() OTHER SOURCES OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE FUNERAL

Consider contacting a church, union or fraternal organization that your loved one belonged to.

() **ENLIST HELP FOR THE FUNERAL**

Relatives and friends may be needed to serve as pallbearers, cook meals for the family or food for a reception, take care of children or pets, music for the service or help with the service program/guest book.

() **ARRANGE FOR A HEADSTONE**

Consult the cemetery that has been chosen about the rules, regulations and specifications such as color and size for a headstone. Often you can purchase one through them or an outside vendor of your choice.

() **SPREAD FUNERAL SERVICE INFORMATION**

Once a date and time have been set for the service, share the details with those on your contact list. Include an address to send cards, flowers or donations.

() **OBITUARY**

The funeral home may offer to prepare an obituary or you may want to write one yourself. Check with the appropriate newspapers to check on rates, deadlines and submission guidelines. Do NOT include such details as exact date of birth that an identity thief could use.

TO DO AFTER THE FUNERAL

() DEATH CERTIFICATES

You may need a dozen certified death certificates to complete many upcoming tasks, though some will require less expensive copies. You will need certified copies to begin the probate process as well as to claim Social Security and insurance benefits, change ownership of joint property, enter safe deposit boxes, to file tax returns, etc. The funeral home will usually obtain these for you or you can order them from the NC Department of Vital Statistics. The website for this office is:

<http://vitalrecords.dhhs.state.nc.us/vr/requests>.

The cost of each certified record is in the \$10-20 range.

() CONSULT WITH AN ESTATE ATTORNEY

An attorney will help you determine if probate is necessary, and if so, what type of probate is necessary in order to handle estate obligations, transfer the assets to the persons named in the will or trust or the decedent's legal heirs. The attorney will take the first steps to initiate the probate process with the filing of the necessary court papers. Engaging a qualified estate attorney with experience in probate issues will enable you to take the best steps to minimize taxes, legal wrangling for the executor, family and beneficiaries, and may save you money and stress in the long run.

If the attorney has not already been selected, the executor should choose the attorney. Friends and family may have recommendations, but an online search can also be an efficient way to find an attorney. The probate process starts with an inventory of all assets (listed previously) which will need to be filed in the probate court.

NEWSPAPER OBITUARY NOTICES

Be sure to save a number of these as some insurance companies require dated newspaper announcements in order to process claims.

() **RECEIVABLES AND DEATH BENEFITS**

Investigate other benefits that may be available to the estate in addition to Social Security, veterans' and union death benefits. Other possibilities may include: employee benefits such as accrued vacation pay, final wages, employee death benefits, pension, profit sharing, IRAs, 401Ks, credit union benefits, reimbursements, refunds on insurance, canceled subscriptions, memberships to professional and trade associations, school alumni, fraternal/sorority, and auto clubs. You will need to contact each of these and conform to their requirements and timeframes.

() **INVENTORY ASSETS**

Create an inventory of ALL assets owned by your loved one to include:

- bank accounts
- stocks and bonds
- life insurance policies
- retirement funds: IRAs, annuities, 401K, pension, profit sharing
- real estate
- automobiles, boats
- household goods, furniture and personal belongings as well as antiques, silver, jewelry, furs, stamp and coin collections
- business interests-ownership interest in any business

() **LIABILITIES AND CREDITORS**

List ALL liabilities to include:

- mortgages
- installment loans
- other secured obligations
- current household bills
- expenses of last illness
- funeral expenses
- any unpaid bills

IMPORTANT: Discuss any payment you make from or for the estate with an attorney. There is considerable liability for the personal representative if these payments are not handled properly. Check all bills CAREFULLY. Be on the lookout for phony bills and overcharge for services.

() **MEDICARE/HEALTH INSURANCE**

If your loved one was receiving Medicare, Social Security will inform the program of the death. If he/she was enrolled in a Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage (Part D), Medicare Advantage plan or had a Medigap policy, contact these plans at the phone numbers listed on each membership card to cancel the insurance. ***Cancel all health insurance with ANY company, but be sure coverage for any dependents continues, if needed.***

() **LIFE INSURANCE**

If there is life insurance, the company will need the policy number and death certificate to process the claim. Check with them for their requirements.

() **OTHER INSURANCE**

Terminate all other insurance policies that might include homeowner's, automobile, etc. However, be sure all assets are protected during the probate period such as the home and car until new ownership/name change has been established.

() **CONTACT FINANCIAL ADVISORS, STOCKBROKERS**

Determine the beneficiary listed on these accounts. Depending on the type of asset, the beneficiary may get access to the account or benefit by simply filling out the appropriate forms and providing a copy of the death certificate.

() **NOTIFY BANKS AND MORTGAGE COMPANIES**

Contact each bank and mortgage company and ask for assistance. You will need to change ownership of joint bank accounts. If there is a safe deposit box, probate court and the bank will have administrative rules to access the box of any decedent. You will need death certificates to accomplish all of these tasks.

() **CLOSE CREDIT CARD ACCOUNTS**

For each account, call the customer service phone number on the credit card statement or issuer's website. Tell the agent you wish to close the account of a deceased relative. You may need to submit a death certificate. If so, send the document by registered mail with return receipt requested. Upon receipt, the company should close the account as of date of death. Keep records of accounts you close and notify the executor of any outstanding debts.

() **TAXES**

There will be tax concerns including filing requirements, communicating with federal and state tax authorities and observing deadlines. Due to the extensive subject matter, please consult an estate attorney for more information. However, certain relevant tax returns are:

- Decedent's Final Income Tax Return
- Gift Tax Returns
- Federal Estate Tax Return
- State Inheritance and Estate Tax Returns
- Fiduciary Tax Returns

() **CANCEL EMAIL AND WEBSITE ACCOUNTS**

It is a good idea to cancel all social media and other online accounts to avoid fraud or identity theft. The procedure will vary for each website.

() **CANCEL MEMBERSHIPS**

Contact each organization to find out how to handle his/her membership status. These might include, fraternities, sororities, professional organizations, volunteer organizations.

() **CANCEL DRIVER'S LICENSE/VOTER REGISTRATION**

Clearing these records helps to prevent identity theft.

() **NOTIFY CREDIT REPORTING AGENCIES**

To minimize the chance of identity theft, provide copies of the death certificate to the three major firms: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion as soon as possible so the account is flagged. Six weeks later, check the decedent's credit history to ensure no fraudulent accounts have been opened.

() **THANK YOU NOTES (optional)**

Send thank you notes and acknowledgements to everyone on your well-wishers' list. Consider delegating this task to a family member.

VERY IMPORTANT

DO NOT MISS DEADLINES

Upon the death of a person, the clock begins ticking on certain important LEGAL deadlines imposed on family members, fiduciaries and beneficiaries by federal and state authorities.

DOCUMENTS AND MAIL

Do NOT throw out any documents such as life insurance policies and certificates, even if the policyholder has stopped paying premiums. The policy may still be in force. Mail and letters may be needed to prove payment or ownership of assets later.

PROOF OF PAYMENT OF EXPENSES

Be sure to get and keep bills , invoices receipts and canceled checks for payments of any and all expenses. The executor will need to supply the probate court with proof of payment.