

# PLANNING YOUR ESTATE

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Helping Your Family  
Find Important Documents

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A guide by  safelyfiled

It's not easy planning your own estate. It reminds you of your mortality. Yet, making sure that your surviving family members don't have to guess about how you want your estate to be distributed and how you want to be buried or cremated is truly your final gift to them.

If they know what you want and know how to find your instructions, they don't have to make critical decisions in their time of sorrow and stress.

Equally important is planning for the potential that you are incapable of directing your affairs while still alive. Usually this happens when we are older, but sometimes, younger people are injured in an accident or contract a serious illness that requires that they be taken care of. Like planning for your death, this too is a gift to your loved ones.

Here's a checklist of some of the documents you may need to prepare and save, or simply collect to properly plan your estate and make sure your wishes are known. There may be more documents you need, want, or are suggested by your attorney or estate planner. Always check with a licensed attorney when preparing many of these documents. Print this list out. After you've prepared the documents on the checklist, do the following:

- Upload the documents or have your attorney or estate planner upload them for you, and
- Use SafelyFiled to set and record the location of the original, and
- Give certain people (like your named executor or trustee) access to your account so they will be able to find the originals, and
- Check them off the list.

## Key Documents

For all of these documents, you want to make sure that the appropriate people know about them and know where they can be located. In the case of a Living Will and Health Care Power of Attorney, copies are usually sufficient.

In the case of a Will, a signed original (there can be more than one original) must be provided before the estate can be settled. If you are married or have a partner, you both should consider having these key documents prepared.

- Will
- Healthcare Power of Attorney
- Living Will
- Trust Documents
- Marriage Certificate
- Civil Union Documents
- Divorce Decrees
- Child Custody Decrees and Agreements

## Asset and Liability Documents

This is probably the hardest part of this list to organize, but it is the key to letting your family quickly identify your assets and liabilities. Remember that most of the companies who issue these statements will have your current records, so the most important thing for you to do is to make sure your family knows about them and knows the account numbers.

You may also want to review any asset that requires you to list a beneficiary to make sure you have the correct person or persons named in the proper capacity and that you've elected certain payment options in the way you would like. For example, some pensions pay the surviving spouse, but the payment can be 100%, 50%, 0% or some other percentage depending on what has been selected.

The quickest, easiest and most accurate way to do that is simply upload a copy of your most recent beneficiary elections and most recent statements from these companies. If there's any change, you can always upload a new statement.

- ❑ Life Insurance Policies

*Some policies are not easy to identify. For example, some medical insurance plans have a small life insurance policy attached, some mortgages and car loans have life insurance added and some organizations provide their members with life insurance policies.*

- ❑ Disability Insurance Policies

- ❑ Annuity Statements

- ❑ Bank Statements

- ❑ Information about the existence of a safe deposit box, location of the key, and an inventory of the contents

- ❑ Brokerage Account Statements

- ❑ Pension Plan Statements

- ❑ IRA / 401k Statements

- ❑ Real Property Trust Documents

- ❑ Real Property Deeds

- ❑ Mortgage Documents

- ❑ Car loan documents

- ❑ Car Titles

- ❑ Leases

*Both as a lessee and a lessor*

- ❑ Promissory Notes

- ❑ Certificates of Deposit

- ❑ Time Share Agreements

- ❑ Military Records

*For the military life policy and pension*

- ❑ Social Security Number

*For surviving spouse and child benefits*

- ❑ Business related documents (stock, LLC membership agreements, loans, etc.)

- ❑ Business contracts

*Where sales commissions or other payments might continue after death*

- ❑ Credit card numbers

- ❑ Other loan documents

- ❑ Judgment Decrees

- ❑ Bankruptcy Decrees

## Taxes

You still have to pay taxes after you die, so make it as easy as possible for your family.

- ❑ Copies of recent tax returns  
*Share access to your Taxes folder in SafelyFiled with your tax accountant, and she might even upload your tax return for you.*
- ❑ Copies of charitable donation receipts
- ❑ Copies of W2's, 1099's and other tax documents  
*Many organizations provide these to you electronically. Take advantage of that and upload them to SafelyFiled.*
- ❑ Receipts for deductions (business expenses, mortgage interest, property taxes, medical expenses, etc.)

## Protecting Your Identity

You don't want your identity stolen after you die, so you need to make sure your family has all the documentation it needs to protect themselves and your estate from thieves. Upload a copy of these documents and let your family know where the originals are located.

- ❑ Birth Certificate
- ❑ Social Security Card
- ❑ Medicare Card
- ❑ Medicaid Card
- ❑ Medicare Supplement Insurance Card
- ❑ Driver's License
- ❑ State ID
- ❑ Passport
- ❑ Student IDs
- ❑ Employee ID and access key
- ❑ Marriage certificate
- ❑ Divorce Decree
- ❑ Child Custody Decrees

## Forgotten Documents

Most of us don't think about the following items. You can create a document dealing with each of the documents listed below and store it in SafelyFiled, or simply use SafelyFiled to record the location of the document you created.

### ❑ Passwords

*You probably have an online identity and many digital assets, like music, your email and social network accounts. These are locked up with a password and if something happens to you, you may want a family member to have access to your accounts. You can store all of your passwords in SafelyFiled.*

### ❑ Instructions about photos in a

*box, on your computer or online*

### ❑ Instructions regarding the care of pets

### ❑ Plans for your funeral

### ❑ Any correspondence relating to outstanding medical bills, including Medicare and insurance company claims

### ❑ Letters you'd like to leave behind, to be read after you're gone

## Removing You From Accounts

The quicker your family can remove your name from certain accounts, the easier it will be for them. Some of these documents you obviously can't get yourself, but your family may want to put them into a SafelyFiled account.

### ❑ Copies of your Death Certificate

*Your family will need more originals than they think—the funeral director can help*

### ❑ Copies of all utility and other bills

*Especially if they are paid online, and most especially if they are on automatic renewal*

### ❑ Professional association membership documents

### ❑ Professional licenses

## Other resources

There are many, many articles on these topics on the Internet. Here are a few links that we have found useful.

### General Planning

- <http://getyourshittogether.org/>
- <http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/12-simple-steps-estate-plan-29472.html>
- <http://www.webbwebb.com/estateplanningchecklist.pdf>

### About Wills

- <http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/wills>
- <http://money.howstuffworks.com/personal-finance/financial-planning/will.htm>

### About Living Wills and Health Care Power of Attorney

- [http://www.alllaw.com/articles/wills\\_and\\_trusts/article7.asp](http://www.alllaw.com/articles/wills_and_trusts/article7.asp)
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advance\\_health\\_care\\_directive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advance_health_care_directive)
- State-specific Living Will templates <http://www.doyourownwill.com/living-will/states.html>

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