

End of Life Decisions Checklist

A legal will is not the only way to make your end-of-life wishes known. You can express desires for your body, dependents, possessions, finances, etc. in other ways. Creating a Death Plan or a document with the following information will be helpful to your next of kin. Placing that plan such that it is dated, can be found easily, and names your wishes clearly, will be a kindness to those who survive your death. Designating a place for your Plan, your will, your written wishes, as well as any codes and passwords, bank keys, insurance policies, final wishes for distributing possessions, etc., will also help those who look after your estate and your dependents.

- Next-of-Kin
 - Who is your legal next-of-kin? This can depend on what state you live in, but most places list the following: spouse; living parents and living children (over 18); if none of the above, siblings (over 18).
 - If you have a *Medical* Power of Attorney, that designated person is your legal next-of-kin for decisions about end-of-life care and decisions about your body (see below for more info about Advance Directives).
- Mortal Remains
 - What are your wishes for your mortal remains/body? Some options include: traditional burial, green burial, cremation, donation to science.
 - Are you an organ/tissue donor? Having “organ donor” listed on your Driver’s License is not carte blanche for medical teams to take your organs. Your medical proxy (legal next-of-kin) has final say in whether or not your organs/tissue are donated.
 - If you want your body donated to science, who do you intend to be the recipient? You should make this arrangement in advance and notify your next-of-kin of your wishes. Depending on where you live, you may need legal documentation in order for the institution (i.e. university) to take possession of your mortal remains.
 - Having a second or third option is sometimes helpful. See Caitlin Doughty’s video “making a death plan” for an example.
- Funeral or Memorial Services
 - What do wish to have included in a funeral (body present) or memorial service (without the body) in your memory?
 - What kind of service, wake, music or other elements of a service that are important to you?
 - Are there rituals or plans you wish to offer to mourners?
- Advance Directives
 - Do you have an Advance Directive (sometimes called a “living will”)?
 - Important to note: ADs are not valid in every state. For example: If you have a New York AD and are hospitalized in California, your AD may not be considered legally binding.

- Questions on ADs include: organ/tissue donation, artificial nutrition and hydration, treatments to prolong life and/or reduce pain, resuscitation, etc.
- Material Possessions
 - What will happen with your finances and possessions? Who is tasked with this? A person with your *Financial Power of Attorney* can act on your behalf before death. An executor is usually the person designated to sort through your finances and property post-death. Who will you designate
 - A will may be the most helpful thing for your next-of-kin in making decisions about what to do with your possessions, accounts, financial investments, property, life insurance, and heirlooms or family papers.
 - If there are bills in your name, most companies require a death certificate in order to cancel plans and subscriptions.
- Intellectual Property and Digital Footprint
 - What do you want done with your digital imprint and intellectual property? How will someone get access to your computer and various accounts (including social media)?
 - Designate someone to take care of your social media presence, your online accounts, and any intellectual property (papers for school, digital journals, art or music you created, etc.) on your computer.
 - What about intellectual property that isn't digital? Do you have journals, paper files on paper? What do you want done with those?
- Legacy
 - Are there organizations you would like people to support in your honor?
 - Have you created an ethical will? Ask yourself: what values, stories, and legacy do you want to leave to family and friends?
 - Do you have pets? Who would you want to take care of them? Are there resources you're able to give them in order to do so?
- Dependents
 - Do you have children under age 18? Who would you want to take care of them? Have you talked with these god-parents, family members or friends? This requires legal documentation and will is a good place to make your wishes clear. Consider questions such as:
 - Would my child need to change schools, towns, and social circles?
 - Would this person(s) have the resources, sufficient time and parental aptitude, as well as the ability to care for my child?
 - Does my child/ren have a positive relationship with the designated caregivers?
 - Is this person(s) willing to care for my child?
 - If my inheritance of property or other wealth will benefit my child, who will oversee the trust?

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