



Use these steps to share your wishes with your loved ones.

Step 1: Most of us have not taken the time to think specifically about what is most important to us as we age. The Conversation Project offers several guides that help you think through and share with your loved ones your preferences in your life and your health care.

<https://theconversationproject.org/>

Step 2: Documents

There are predictable life events such as aging, and those that we cannot predict. The Power of Attorney and the Health Care Proxy ensure that your finances and healthcare will be managed according to your wishes if you become incapacitated for some reason. The third document, The Last Will and Testament, specifies the distribution of your assets and possessions following your death.

The websites below are included strictly to provide information about each document. Seeking legal advice from an attorney is highly recommended before completing any of these documents.

The Power of Attorney designates an individual of your choosing to manage your finances if you are not able. [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/real\\_property\\_trust\\_estate/resources/estate\\_planning/power\\_of\\_attorney/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/real_property_trust_estate/resources/estate_planning/power_of_attorney/)

The Healthcare Proxy designates an individual of your choosing to speak on your behalf if you cannot speak for yourself regarding healthcare decisions.

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/advance-care-planning/choosing-health-care-proxy>

Your Last Will and Testament states how you want your property and possessions to be distributed after your death.

[https://www.americanbar.org/groups/real\\_property\\_trust\\_estate/resources/estate\\_planning/an\\_introduction\\_to\\_wills/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/real_property_trust_estate/resources/estate_planning/an_introduction_to_wills/)

## Looking to Set Priorities for the New Year?

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If I could suggest one thing folks do to start the year off on the right foot, it would be to share your thoughts on what is important to you with your family!

‘The advice my parents ever gave me was writing down their wishes. They had made all the decisions ahead of time. We didn’t have to think about those details when we were grieving their loss.’

I have heard similar comments from a number of families, but I have heard from too many more that little or no planning was done. The result was confusion and disagreement among family members.

Too often families are torn apart because a parent or elder loved one didn’t want to take the time to think about what mattered to him/her, share those thoughts with family members, and then complete the necessary documents to ensure those wishes were followed.

Planning is difficult. It reminds us that we are both vulnerable and mortal. It is hard to imagine ourselves ever losing control and our independence. It’s easier to just not think about it. This is the paradox of planning! It is the very thing that ensures we will have control over how we live and where, who will manage our finances and health care decisions if we are unable, what we choose to leave behind and to whom. Planning is the roadmap that keeps your family from going ‘off course’.

Planning is not just about end of life wishes. Planning should include your thoughts about living a meaningful life if you lose the ability to live independently. What is important to you? What constitutes a good day? Where do you want to live? With whom do you want to spend your time? Once you have given these issues some thought, it’s important to share them with your family. You can do this in person if there is an opportunity, or you might decide to write them a letter. Either way, it is important to share the same information with all family members. Then, since everyone interprets information differently, be sure to encourage questions to clarify your intentions.

When your family understands what you value in your life, they will have a guiding light when difficult decisions arise. When they are given roles and responsibilities in the caregiving journey, you will have empowered them with the tools to manage this emotional experience.

Tell them what matters to you. Share your plans. Give them this priceless gift!

Questions? Comments? Let me know!

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