



Loss of a Loved One Playbook

Losing a loved one often brings memories, emotions, and family dynamics to the forefront, in addition to grief over the loss of an individual and perhaps also the life you shared. As difficult as it can be, it is also a time of transition — a handing over of legacy between people or generations. By properly preparing to tackle the logistical process of settling an estate, you will be able to better honor your loved one's memory and wishes and find solace in properly and thoughtfully putting your loved one, and their affairs, to rest.

► Immediate Considerations

For those who play a role in settling the estate, finding a balance between addressing the necessary steps and personal and family well-being is important. Take some time to identify and lean on your own support network — remember to take care of yourself even as you do the work to facilitate the estate transfer.

You typically want to notify family and friends promptly of your loved one's death. You can use these conversations to help set the stage for the coming months, respecting everyone's emotions regarding the news while ensuring necessary tasks are addressed and everyone is apprised of updates. As you start making funeral arrangements, you will want to coordinate and consider the wishes of the deceased along with ideas family and friends may have. Honoring your loved one and providing a forum for shared remembrance can bring a sense of connection and purpose for those left behind.

The executor of the estate has one obligation, which is to the estate rather than the individuals. The best thing for everyone involved is settling the estate in a timely manner before grief turns to frustration. Effective progress and consistent communication are crucial in avoiding conflict down the road.

Most immediate tasks largely revolve around notifying all entities of their passing. This can include their employer, the Social Security Administration and their bank or credit union, as well as their doctor and dentist. Be prepared for each entity to provide you with their own paperwork and list of requirements to complete, though a copy of the death certificate will be the most common necessity (which is why it is recommended you request at least 10 copies). You may

also need to make short-term plans for any pets left behind, or even address who will take care of the house and water the plants, until you reach a point of making longer-term arrangements.

While you are busy with settling an estate and processing your own grief, consider avoiding or delaying big decisions, including major financial decisions such as buying or selling property. Be aware that predatory salespeople may wish to take advantage of your divided attention and heightened emotional state. You may also want to obtain a copy of the decedent's credit reports a few months after their passing to ensure that no fraudulent accounts have been opened in their name and to help eliminate identity theft.





► Organize Legal and Financial Documents

After taking care of immediate needs, you will need to gather several legal and financial documents to proceed with the estate, including the decedent's will, death certificate, financial statements, and tax returns, as well as all identification and insurance information. Many of these you will readily find, and others may require some sleuthing. Consider using D.A. Davidson's checklist to help keep track of many of the various required documents. Talk with your financial professional, and tax and legal professionals, about any organizations who will help maintain your benefits after your loved one's death, including the Social Security Administration, and the decedent's employer, as you will want to start their necessary claim processes promptly.

► Schedule Appointments with Professionals and Organizations

Reach out to schedule appointments with your estate team of professionals, such as your attorney, financial professional and tax professional, who can help you navigate the overall process of settling your loved one's estate. Keep in mind that processing the estate and facilitating the transfer of assets to beneficiaries will take time, and your financial professional can help coordinate with the other professionals involved. The steps and time required to transition assets will vary depending on titling, account and asset location, and a variety of legal requirements, but knowing what information you need to get started as well as who you can lean on for guidance can help enable a smooth wealth transfer process.

Quick Facts:

- Only 32% of Americans have estate documents in place.¹
- The two most common reasons people cite for not having estate documents prepared: they "haven't gotten around to it" or feel they do not have any assets to leave anyone.²
- The average cost of a funeral is \$7,000 to \$12,000.³

► Update Your Financial Plan

Depending on your relationship, this can be an important time to update your own financial plan, especially if you and your loved one shared finances. Make sure you have the resources to meet your immediate needs, such as funeral costs. You may then need to reassess life insurance and health care coverage if your benefits were tied with the deceased. Sit down with your financial professional to discuss how your financial picture may have changed, define new priorities or goals, and build a financial plan to identify gaps and move forward with clarity.

► Why We Can Help

Whether you are the executor of an estate or a beneficiary, a current client or looking for a new financial professional, we have the expertise and tools you need to map a path forward. In whatever capacity, we want to help you navigate the conversations as well as implement your decisions to carry you into the next chapter. Thank you for the opportunity to help guide you through this key moment in your life.

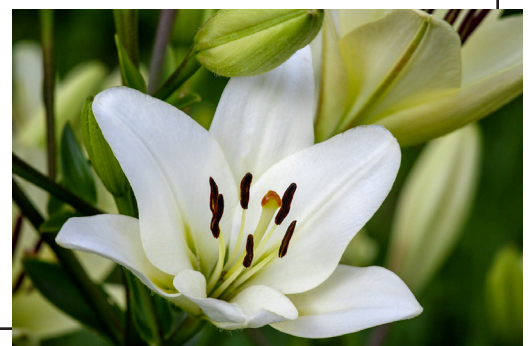


Checklist

The passing of a loved one can be challenging emotionally, personally, and brings with it many important decisions that require your thoughtful consideration. You may be faced with difficult and overwhelming tasks and details to track. Whether you will be handling the details yourself or enlisting the help of a relative or friend, the following checklist can provide a useful road map.

Immediate Considerations

- ☐ Notify family, friends, and clergy.
- ☐ Identify and reach out to your support network, and set aside time for yourself to process, grieve, and prioritize your well-being so you can be fully present in the work you will do for others during this time.
- ☐ **Funeral Home:** Make an appointment with a funeral home for arrangements or execute previously made arrangements. Remember that family and friends may have additional ideas on how to honor the deceased and can contribute to the planning process. As applicable, bring the following for the initial meeting:
 - Date and place of birth and death, parents' names, names of pre-deceased relatives and survivors, Social Security number, dates of marriages/divorces
 - Highest level of education and occupation
 - Military information including separation or discharge papers (DD-214)
 - The deceased's wishes regarding funeral and burial instructions
 - Agreement documents showing that all or part of the deceased's funeral costs have been prepaid
 - Place of burial or final disposition if cemetery plot has been purchased
 - Photographs to be used during the embalming process
 - Clothing, including undergarments, jewelry, and glasses, you would like for the viewing
- ☐ **Social Security Administration and Veterans Affairs:** Normally the funeral home will notify the Social Security Administration and Veterans Affairs (if applicable) on your behalf.
- ☐ **Employer:** If the deceased was employed, notify their employer of the death and request benefits information, claim forms (health insurance, life insurance, retirement plan, pension, etc.), salary, or vacation/sick pay owed. Ask if you or other dependents are still eligible for benefit coverage.
- ☐ **Life Insurance Company:** Contact the insurance company or agent to obtain death claim forms you will need to complete and submit. The deceased's financial professional will often help you with this. If you know the deceased had a life insurance policy but you cannot find it, contact American Council of Life Insurers (www.acli.com), which offers guidance in tracing missing policies.
- ☐ Cancel scheduled doctor appointments, etc.
- ☐ Request at least 10 copies of the death certificate from the funeral home or county clerk.
- ☐ Make a short-term care plan for loved one's dependents, including pets, as well as their home.





Short-Term Tasks

- ☐ Notify financial institutions for the deceased's bank and investment accounts. Gather instructions to reregister the accounts. A copy of the death certificate, affidavit of domicile, letter of testamentary and other account documents and instructions are typically required, as applicable.
- ☐ Talk with your financial professional and tax professional to determine whether collecting survivor benefits makes sense; they may conflict with retirement benefits.
- ☐ If you have children in college, notify their financial aid offices, as they may qualify for additional assistance.

Preventing Fraud and Credit Issues

- ☐ Consider delaying major financial decisions (e.g., buying or selling a house) for at least six months while you recover from this loss. This helps avoid rushed decisions or interactions with predatory salespeople.
- ☐ To confirm no new accounts were opened, and to help eliminate identity theft, obtain a credit report 1-2 months after notifying the three credit reporting agencies of death.

Organize Legal and Financial Documents

- Estate planning documents (Will and Trust)
- Beneficiary designations (name, current address, Social Security numbers, birth date, current phone number)
- Recent checking and savings account statements
- Safety deposit box keys and contents inventory
- Certificates of deposit and stock certificates
- Recent brokerage and investment statements
- Retirement plans and/or recent statements
- Birth certificate and death certificate
- Social Security card, driver's license, passport, citizenship, military separation papers
- Marriage certificate
- Divorce decree
- Mortgages, loans, leases, credit card statements
- Deeds, titles, promissory notes, business interests, royalties, real estate documents
- Life insurance and annuity policies
- Health insurance
- Prior year's tax returns
- Property and auto insurance
- All current and/or past due bills
- Any other claim forms

Digital Assets and Accounts

- Digital wallet or cryptocurrency account statements
- Online documents/files
- Social networking (Facebook, X, etc.)
- Cloud storage
- Online media accounts
- Other digital assets (e.g., Airline Mileage plan)





► **Schedule Appointment with Professionals and Organizations**

- ☐ **Attorney:** Meet with an attorney to review the Will and determine whether a petition for probate of the Will must be filed. The attorney will prepare any documents necessary to confirm authority of Successor Trustee of the Trust or Executor or Personal Representative of the Will. The attorney will apply for a Federal EIN for the Estate, if applicable. The attorney will be able to answer any questions regarding the role and responsibilities of the Trustee, Executor, or Personal Representative. The attorney will also review documents and agreements if the deceased had any business interests.
- ☐ **Social Security Administration:** Schedule an appointment with the local office to claim survivor benefits (after discussing whether they make sense for your specific situation with your financial professional and tax professional). Inquire as to what documents and information will be needed. If the deceased was receiving benefits via direct deposit, request that the bank return funds received for the month of death and thereafter to Social Security. Do not cash any Social Security checks received by mail. Return all checks to Social Security as soon as possible.
- ☐ **Veterans Affairs:** Schedule an appointment with the local office to claim survivor benefits. Inquire as to what documents and information will be needed. Benefits to a spouse and heirs may include pension payments and financial aid for educational costs.
- ☐ **Bank or Credit Union Institutions:** Inquire as to what documents and information will be needed. Meet with a representative to retitle or open new accounts, identify designated beneficiaries, and transfer or distribute assets.
- ☐ **Financial Professional:** Inquire as to what documents and information will be needed. Meet with the financial professional to retitle or open new accounts, identify designated beneficiaries, and transfer or distribute assets. You should also discuss and complete any claim forms for the deceased's life insurance and annuities and discuss the different options available and how to arrange for income from the deceased's employer retirement plan benefits or union survivor benefits.
- ☐ **Tax Professional:** Meet with the tax professional, such as a Certified Public Accountant, to review the tax situation as the surviving spouse, successor Trustee of the Trust, or Executor of the Estate. The Estate may need to file an estate tax return within nine months from the date of death. Inquire as to what information, forms or documents you will need to collect for preparation of the tax return.

► **Contact Other Organizations, Agencies, and Companies**

- ☐ **Medicare:** The Social Security Administration will notify Medicare of the death. If the deceased was receiving Medicare Part D (prescription drug), a Medicare Advantage Plan or a Medigap Policy, contact the plan provider to cancel the policy.
- ☐ **Credit Cards, Merchant Cards, and Other Creditors:** Notify the deceased's creditors. Close and destroy credit cards held by the deceased and keep records of the amount owed. Update the billing name for all joint credit cards. Check to see if there was additional life insurance connected with the deceased's accounts.
- ☐ **Utilities:** Update billing name.



- ☐ **Credit Agencies:** Contact the three credit reporting agencies to report the death: Equifax (www.Equifax.com), Experian (www.Experian.com), TransUnion (www.TransUnion.com). This will help eliminate identity theft.
- ☐ **Do Not Contact List:** Contact the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) to register the deceased's name on the Deceased Do Not Contact List. This will remove the deceased from commercial marketing lists (www.DMAchoice.org).
- ☐ **Other Insurance Carriers:** Notify all other insurance carriers including health (medical, dental, vision), long-term care, umbrella, disability, accidental death, travel, vehicle, homeowners, or renters insurance. If you were covered by their plans, determine if you can remain on it or need to make other plans.
- ☐ **Other Organizations:** Contact unions, or professional, service, or fraternal organizations of which the deceased was a member. Inquire if they had life insurance or other benefits through these organizations.
- ☐ **Change Titling:** Retitle any property (including real estate and automobiles) owned by the deceased. Work with your attorney on the timing of these changes.
- ☐ **Mortgages and Loans:** Notify each company/party of the death. In many cases, mortgage insurance covering death of a borrower is available and may be something to inquire about.
- ☐ **Online Accounts:** Monitor the deceased's email, social media, and other web-based accounts, and close them once they are no longer needed.
- ☐ **Cancel Memberships:** Cancel professional associations, unions, health, athletic, automobile, alumni club, etc.

► Update Your Financial Plan

- ☐ Make sure you have sufficient cash on hand. You may want to take part of life insurance proceeds or other death benefits and increase cash reserves to meet current expenses as well as funeral costs.
- ☐ Establish a budget and make a list of income and expenses.
- ☐ Establish an emergency fund, usually 3-6 month's living expenses.
- ☐ Assess the need for life and health coverage especially if you have minor children.
- ☐ Meet with your attorney and financial professional and determine what changes need to be made. In particular, you will likely need to update all beneficiary designations, Wills, Trusts, Powers of Attorney, and investment plans.

► If you have any questions, please reach out to your D.A. Davidson financial professional.



1, 2 <https://www.caring.com/caregivers/estate-planning/wills-survey>

3 <https://www.lhlic.com/consumer-resources/average-funeral-cost>

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