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## ***Easing Grief by Creating a Death Plan***

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Whether death is near or far away, creating a death plan and communicating it to your loved ones is a way to ease the grief that will arise upon your death.

It can feel overwhelming to get this “task” done. When it comes to procrastinating, end of life planning is probably right up there with other dreaded tasks. Approaching a death plan with a loving attitude is helpful. Completing this work is a giant love letter to the people you love and entrust to take care of your final wishes. Overcoming discomfort with the subject of death helps us to take responsibility for our end. When everyone knows what to do when you die, there is far less stress which helps the grieving process.

### **Basic Components of a Death Plan**

- A title and date
- Your philosophy and/or feelings about death
- Healthcare Proxy, Power of Attorney and Advanced Care Directives
- What I want to happen as I die: Deathcare before, during and after my death
- Disposition of my body
- Funeral or Celebration of Life
- Eulogy – basic information to help write it
- Who needs to be notified of my death
- Passwords, online accounts, email, social media
- Copy of driver’s license, social security card and birth certificate
- Signature
- Communicate where this document is physically stored and update as needed

#### **1. Title and date**

- The title should clearly reference what the document is.
- Examples: My Last Wishes, My Final Wishes, My Death Plan, Final Business at the End of My Life, Last Wishes for (your name).
- The date should say: Last updated on \_\_\_\_\_.

## **2. Philosophy and/or feelings about death**

- Sharing your feelings and beliefs about death is a potent way to ease the grief of your people. It gives them something to hang on to in your absence. Potentially, it provides a pathway to After Death Communication (ADC).
- What do you believe happens when death arrives? Is it hard? Easy? Will you reunite with ancestors and friends on the other side? Are you afraid? Curious? Ready? Not ready?
- Do you believe in heaven? Angels? Spirit guides? Religious icons? Ascended masters?
- Do you have no idea what will happen which limits your ability to write about it? What happens after we die falls into the category of the Great Unknown or The Great Mystery. No one knows for sure but...we can imagine what it will be like...we can hope for things. Feel free to use your imagination and share your hopes even though it's not known.
- Do you feel that nothing happens? That we're here and then we're gone. Elaborate and explain why you feel that way.
- Caveat: If your imaginings are dark and fear based, it might not be helpful to share that with your people.

## **3. Health Care Proxy, Power of Attorney and Advanced Care Directives**

- In the state of Ohio, you can complete a Medical Power of Attorney (POA) on your own or through an attorney or a death doula or family member or a variety of medical providers including hospice.
- You can google Ohio Medical POA and a number of resources come up. You can print a pdf form, fill it out and get it notarized. UPS stores notarize for \$5.
- Once the Medical POA is completed, include a copy with your death plan.
- The form allows up to three POA's – a primary Agent, a 1<sup>st</sup> Alternative Agent and a 2<sup>nd</sup> Alternative Agent. Make sure each agent has a copy of the Medical POA and the death plan.

## **4. What I want to happen as I die: Deathcare before, during and after my death**

- Are you open to hospice care? Do you want hospice care as soon as possible?
- If you are at the end stages of a life limiting disease, how do you feel about treatment? Do you want the most aggressive treatment up to the end? Would you prefer to manage the symptoms of the disease over trying to cure it?

- How do you feel about pain management? Are you against having pain meds like morphine to control pain and discomfort? Do you prefer to be as pain free as possible and want the pain meds? Would like to remain as mentally cognizant as possible while using the pain meds?
- Where do you prefer to die? At home? At the hospital? At a hospice intake unit? Other?
- Who do you want present in the dying process? Do you want your close family and friends around you? Is there anyone you don't want in the room? Do you prefer privacy and want to minimize contact with people? Do you want to open the space for people who want to say good-bye?
- What do you want the atmosphere to be like? Do you want people to share stories and laugh? Do you prefer silence and a solemn atmosphere? Do you want candles, scents, flowers? Do you want to create a sacred atmosphere with meaningful objects around you? Do you want music?
- What do you want to happen once you die? Do you want the funeral home to be called as quickly as possible? Would you like your loved ones to bathe and dress your body and hang out for a while before the funeral home is called?
- Would you like a ritual to be performed either before, during or after your death? A ritual can help your people process the grief. For example, rituals include speaking prayers and messages to you, adorning your body with flowers, or singing a song.

## **5. Disposition of my body**

- What do you want to happen to your body after you die? Do you want a traditional funeral and viewing? A cemetery burial? Cremation? Green natural burial?
- If you want a traditional burial, who is the preferred funeral home? Have you made pre-arrangements? (This is preferable).
- If cremated, do you want people present while the cremation is happening? Do you want a ritual? What do you want to happen to the ashes?

## **6. Funeral or celebration of life?**

- Do you want a traditional funeral in a funeral home? How soon do you want it? Do you know a celebrant or minister who can officiate the funeral? Who do you want to do the eulogy? What pictures and objects do you want to represent you? (Again, pre-planning with a funeral home is preferred).
- Do you prefer a celebration of life? How soon do you want it? Where do you want it to take place? What kind of tone do you prefer? Who do you want to lead the celebration? Who do you want to speak? Do you want a eulogy? What pictures and objects do you want to represent you?

- Do you prefer something very low key or nothing at all? If you do not want a funeral or celebration of life, provide an explanation as to why so your people can understand.

## **7. Eulogy – providing basic information to help write it**

- Providing basic information will help the person who is eulogizing you to write it and include information that is important to you.
- Here are some prompts to help provide information:
  - Date and place of birth
  - Parents and siblings
  - First home/early childhood and upbringing
  - Adolescent years/schools attended
  - Fondest family moments
  - Early adulthood/first job/college
  - Proudest career achievements
  - Making your own family/marriage/children
  - Fondest family moments
  - Proudest civic accomplishments and involvements
  - Hobbies/personal achievement
  - Favorite movies, music, people, food, places, poems, etc.

## **8. Who needs to be notified of my death?**

- Presumably, your family will notify family members and friends who are close and known to your people.
- Who is in your circle of acquaintances that wouldn't be in your close loop of people? Perhaps it's an online group or membership? Social media communities and groups? Volunteer groups you spend time within your community? Neighbors? People at the dog park? Think about people in your outer circle and provide a name and phone number and/or email address. They will want to know.
- Do you want your death announced on your Facebook page or other social media? Or on other outlets or community networks?
- Be sure to keep this section updated with additions and deletions.

## **9. Passwords**

- **CRITICAL:** Provide the passcode to open your PHONE. If you have an Apple phone, it is not easy to gain permission to access the phone of someone who has died. It will make things easier if people can access your contacts, respond to texts, etc. using your phone.
- Password to access your computer.

- Provide the password to your email account, online accounts, online banking, investment accounts – anything that they will need to settle your estate. Automatic payments such as utilities, mortgages, rent, subscriptions, etc.
- Social media account passwords. Do you want your social media presence to stay online? Do you want your accounts closed? When is a good time to close them? Who should be in charge of your social media after you die?
- Do you have a website or other online businesses?
- Do you have accounts for entertainment? Netflix? Amazon Prime? Hulu?
- Do you have a password book that lists your primary accounts? Where is it stored?
- Consider using a password manager where all of your passwords are stored and you only need to know one password to access all of your passwords. There are many providers such as, 1password, Lastpass or Nordpass. Ask a trusted IT person what they recommend.

#### **10. Copies of your driver's license, social security card and birth certificate**

- You might keep your original social security card and certified birth certificate in the same place where this death plan is stored.
- Include any documentation that will help close your estate.

#### **11. Signature**

- Type your name and sign it on the bottom.

#### **12. Communicate where this document is physically stored and update as needed**

- Let your executor of your estate and your medical POA's know where this document is stored.
- Common places to store these documents are the freezer (wrapped in a ziplock bag), an underwear drawer, a safe, a safety deposit box, a desk file drawer. Wherever you store it, make sure you provide access to keys or combinations to safes.
- Review and update the document as needed or at least once a year.
- Specify on the document that the latest version will be dated, printed and stored in the place you indicate. The physical copies that might be in the hands of your executor or POA's may be different than what is stored. State that they should use the most up to date copy.

### **13. Additional documents that can be included with the Death Plan:**

- Last Will & Testament
- Estate Planning documentation
- Financial Information (bank accounts, credit cards, life insurance policies, 401K, etc.)
- Funeral pre-need documents & funeral insurance documents
- Real Estate Documents & Deeds
- Financial Power of Attorney
- Debtor information
- Any documents that you know are important to share with your people