

Have You Filled Out the Paperwork?

Marcia L. Howland, PhD

Documents are important especially in a time of family crisis. It is easy to procrastinate when it comes to paperwork. It can be confusing. Everyone wants to avoid paperwork hassles. Families, who collect documents, safely store them and advise someone where they reduce anxiety and hasten accessibility. Don't postpone completing important documents. An open invitation to discuss the issues relative to the end-of-life is one of the greatest gifts family members can give to each other. Do it before a crisis situation forces itself upon you. Planning informs the family about medical, legal, historical, professional, and personal information.

In my family, my father wanted a traditional burial, my mother cremation—a gridlock. My sister and I respected each parent's personal choice and planned with them accordingly. We appreciated the moral, ethical and spiritual principles that guided our family's discussion. Early decision-making relieved tension between the parents and guided us during our grief. And, by the way, this is not just for the elderly—birth imperfection, illness, or accident happens unexpectedly at any age.

Part of soul care is familial respect for differing opinions about how to memorialize a loved one. Frequently, when someone dies, family members scurry around trying to find all the pertinent documents regarding funeral arrangements and estate settlement. Unfinished physical, emotional, financial and spiritual business prolongs grief and possibly alienates family members. With all affairs in order, my sister and I were able to follow through with parental wishes, process our grief and continue life in a new normal.

The time to make these decisions is before a crisis occurs when all heads are clear.

Documented instructions clarify who, what, when, how and where business is to be conducted. Updating information reduces grief by half and doubles pleasure by fulfilling thought out expectations among family members. It avoids uncertainty and delayed accessibility to pertinent

information during a time of sorrow. When decisions are made, written down, updated and distributed to the family, the honorable thing to do is respectfully carry them out. Accurate personal information should be recorded about all family members, friends, and business: name, (changes of name), address, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, education, employment, church, clergy, attorney and funeral home.

Important documents include:

- Medical Advance Directive
- Do Not Resuscitate Order or organ donor documentation
- Financial disclosure
- Insurance documentation
- Real estate documentation
- Bank accounts
- Safety deposit boxes
- Investments
- Social security benefits
- Military benefits
- Retirement benefits
- Wills
- List of personal properties
- Deeds of ownership
- Marriage and other licenses

All should be completed, filed, updated and readily accessible for a legally designated person.

Funeral arrangements document, name and site deed of cemetery lot, crypt, niche, or placement of ashes should be easily accessible. The choice of funeral home and presiding clergyperson or celebrant, pallbearers, flowers, music, readings, clothing, jewelry, casket type and color can be

predetermined and even prepaid if that is a choice. Vital statistics need to be accurate for the newspaper and for family history.

The spirit of the person lives on and influences the next generations. It is important to communicate with respect, honest feelings, and appropriate actions for life's last act. My parents did that with us. We are forever grateful.

References

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2. Loverde, Joy. *Complete Eldercare Planner*, 2nd ed. New York, NY: Random House, 2000.