

WHAT TO DO WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES

A checklist to help get settled

- Contact relatives and close friends.** When possible, share doing so with others. Locate the decedent's address book or "Contacts" file on his/her computer/phone. Look for a funeral planner checklist/workbook with names, contact information, and important data, including location of records, listing of pre-decisions, names of trusted advisers (attorney/insurance agent/accountant/clergy), etc.
- Notify place of worship**, if applicable.
- Contact funeral home.** Decedent may have made arrangements in advance; if not, try to get a personal referral to a funeral home (through decedent's place of worship, friend, colleague, doctor, etc.).

NOTE: Refer to estate plan documents (Will or Health Care Directive) regarding burial/cremation decisions. If decedent's wishes are not clear, heirs may need to confer and agree, by majority, in order to proceed.

- Obtain certified death certificates**, usually available through the funeral home and/or crematorium. We recommend ordering a dozen or more as they will be needed to transfer bank and other financial accounts, as well as to send to insurers and others who may be holding assets or benefits payable to the estate. One is also needed in order to begin the probate process. Order more than you think may be needed because it is time consuming and costly to order more later.
- Submit obituary** to local paper/media or confirm that the funeral home is doing so.
- Notify employer and investigate other employment benefits** that may be available to the estate, including union death benefits and/or employee benefits (e.g., accrued vacation pay, pension benefits, final wages, death benefits, COBRA benefits for survivors, reimbursements, and/or refunds on insurance premiums).
- Notify the Social Security Administration** to claim the Social Security death benefit. Also, if decedent is receiving benefits, stop those payments. If not stopped, any amounts received will have to be refunded or sent back to the Social Security office. Determine if there are spousal/dependent benefits available for the survivors. 800-772-1213; SSA.gov
- Notify military** if the deceased was a member of any of the armed forces; if so, also check for death benefits. U.S. Office of Personnel Management – 888-767-6738

- Contact the Post Office (USPS)** to coordinate having all mail forwarded to the executor/personal representative (if no surviving spouse). Monitor mail to assist with searching for assets and valuables, as well as any debts due.
- Cancel all credit/debit cards** (if not in joint names with surviving spouse). Remove the deceased's name from any accounts if the survivor intends to continue using them; close any accounts that will no longer be used. If an account was in the deceased's name only, close the account.
- Contact the credit bureaus** to put an alert on the decedent's credit report:
 - Equifax.com – 800-685-1111
 - Experian.com – 888-397-3742
 - TransUnion.com – 800-888-4213
- Locate estate documents.** Look in decedent's home files, safe deposit box, and/or through personal financial papers. Contact decedent's attorney and the probate court in the county where decedent resided.
 - Will: The original is to be turned over to the courts via probate – be sure to keep a copy for future reference.
 - Trust(s): The decedent may have utilized a Revocable Trust and possibly one or more Irrevocable Trusts in their estate planning. If a Revocable Trust is in place, it may become irrevocable at death, which will require a new Tax Identification Number (TIN).
 - Determine if there are appointed fiduciaries (such as a power of attorney, executor, personal representative, trustee, and/or guardian/custodian) so that they may be notified to fulfill their roles and responsibilities for the deceased's estate.
- Ascertain the extent of the decedent's **Assets and Liabilities**, including:
 - Safe deposit box
Contact the bank(s) where decedent had accounts to determine if there is a safe deposit box. If so, the keys will need to be found (a good reason to have another name on file with the bank). If no one else is on the box/paperwork, the executor/personal representative will need to have a certified death certificate along with the Letter of Testamentary in order to access the contents of the box.

- Real Estate

Determine the owner(s), the legal description(s), any real estate tax information, the existence of any encumbrances on the property(ies), and the location of any abstract(s) or certificate(s) of title to the property. This is important for property owned by the decedent in every state. Include partial ownership in real property and time share unit ownerships. An Affidavit of Identity and Survivorship will need to be filed with the County Recorder or Registrar of Titles to remove deceased's name from any jointly owned real estate.

- Vehicles

Attain vehicle registration(s) to determine ownership and titling so the value can be included in the estate and retitled as appropriate.

- Household goods, furniture, and personal belongings

Make a list of all household goods, furniture, and personal belongings, and estimate the value of these assets. Also, make a separate list of tangible items of special value, such as antiques, artwork, precious metals, jewelry, furs, or collections. Take photographs of everything.

Many people have prepared a list wherein they have designated whom they want to receive their tangible personal property. Often this list is attached to their Will or may be found in their personal papers, a funeral planner checklist/workbook, or safe deposit box. The executor/personal representative has a duty to follow the Will and list in distributing all tangible personal property.

- Stocks and/or bonds

Determine the existence of any stocks or savings bonds. Locate the stock certificate numbers, total number of shares for each stock, cost basis and current market value of the stock, the type of savings bonds, the face value of the bonds, and the owner(s) and beneficiary(ies) of these assets.

- Life insurance policies

Locate any/all life insurance policies (personal, business, employer, etc.) to learn the name of the insurance carrier, as well as the owner, beneficiaries, and the death benefits of the policies to be paid.

Be sure to check for possible double indemnities under existing policies. If the deceased died in an accidental death, their estate may be eligible to

collect above and beyond the standard life insurance benefit if the policy carried an accidental death clause. The deceased may also have carried additional accident insurance if they purchased airline tickets on a major credit card or were a member of an auto or travel club. Contact insurance agent/carrier(s) for proper claim forms.

- Retirement funds

Determine whether there are retirement accounts including IRAs, 401(k)s, annuities, pensions and/or profit sharing accounts. Learn where they are held, the current value, and who is stated as the beneficiary. Contact the Human Resources department at decedent's employer (or prior employer) for instructions on how to handle employee benefit assets.

- Business interests

If decedent owned any interest in a partnership, sole proprietorship, or corporation, determine whether there are any agreements governing the business, the extent of the decedent's interest in the business, and the value of the decedent's interest in the business.

- Bank accounts

Determine the existence of all bank accounts, including where they are held, the account numbers, owners, values on the date of death, and whether or not any beneficiaries are designated on the accounts. In cases of joint accounts, these should be kept open and unchanged until all other assets are accounted for and settled.

- Debts and/or liabilities

Determine the existence of any debts and/or liabilities, including mortgages, other secured obligations, bank loans, current household bills, credit card obligations, expenses of last illness, funeral expenses, etc. Be sure to get receipts for payments of any and all bills. The executor/personal representative appointed may need to supply the probate court with proof of payment.

If there are credit cards or other charge accounts held jointly with the deceased, the joint owner will be liable for the amount owed. In Minnesota, a spouse is responsible only for the "family necessary" bills, including medical bills, on the account of a deceased spouse.

- Medical bills

File health insurance claims to pay expenses of last illness.

- Identify digital assets** that need to be addressed. Examples of these include bitcoin/cryptocurrency accounts, online financial institutions, emails/social media accounts, and any online activities such as photos, genealogy information, volunteer organizations, etc.
- Keep records of all expenditures and payments.** Retain receipts for all payments made including expenses of last illness and funeral.
- Keep property/casualty insurance in-force** (homeowner's, vehicle(s), umbrella liability, and any personal property) so that assets will remain protected during the probate period. However, do notify the carrier/agent of death for their records.
- A final **income tax return** will need to be filed with the IRS. Collect the last three to five years of tax returns to do so.
- If there are minor children**, a guardian is usually nominated in the Will. A guardianship is required for minor children who would be receiving cash and/or valuable property in accordance with the decedent's Will. Always check the Will as to whom the decedent named as guardian and custodian for the minor children.
- Cancel memberships and subscriptions** including automatic bill-pay services, gym/health clubs, magazines and newspapers, online delivery subscriptions, service subscriptions such as cleaning or maintenance services, etc.
- Consider “safety” precautions** to create an appearance of the decedent's home being occupied as normal. Alert trusted neighbors as to the current status and ask someone to check in on the home and/or surviving spouse occasionally.

Work closely with your trusted advisers throughout the process. They, like us, are here to help during this time.

We hope this overview is insightful. Please let us know how we can best assist you.