

How To Get Started With Your Estate Plan

November is Financial Literacy Month and a will is a key component of a strong financial plan. If you haven't created a will yet, now is the perfect time to get your estate in order to protect your assets, investments, and most importantly, your family. This article will cover everything you need to know to get started in order to [make a will](#).

1. Identify The Key People Involved

Before sitting down to make your will, you should make a list of the people you'd like to fill the key roles in an estate plan:

Guardian(s): The Guardian(s) of your children will take legal, moral and financial responsibility for your children if you and your spouse pass away. We know that it's not fun to think about someone else raising your child, but having someone in place to take on this responsibility will provide significant peace of mind knowing your child would be in the best hands possible. Whether you choose an individual or a couple, you should only choose someone you trust entirely. If you have pets, it's a good idea to also assign a pet guardian to maintain their care in the event you become incapacitated or pass away.

Executor and Estate Trustee: This person ensures the wishes in your will are followed, distributes your assets to beneficiaries, and can also act on your behalf for business and financial interests after you've passed away.

Spouse: If you're married or common law, you may want to create a mirrored Will, which means you'll need to work together to make decisions on your shared assets and/or dependants.

Power of Attorney for Property: If you were to become incapacitated due to illness or injury, who would ensure your bills get paid, your home is taken care of, and your taxes are paid? Your Power of Attorney for Property is the person who will make decisions about your property and finances if you are medically unable to do so. This should be somebody you trust, such as a spouse, relative or close friend.

Power of Attorney for Personal Care: Again, if you were to become incapacitated due to illness or injury and unable to communicate your wishes, who would speak up for you? You

guessed it - your Power of Attorney for Personal Care. This person will be the voice of your healthcare decisions (which you've already outlined in your will) if you are unable to communicate. This should be a spouse, relative or close friend with good judgment and the ability to stay level-headed in high-stress situations.

Backups: Choosing backups (also called substitutes) will add additional layers of security to your estate plan. If your initial choice refuses the task or later on becomes unable to fulfill the role for other reasons, having a plan B will make sure your plan is still followed.

2. Have The Hard Conversations

However difficult the topic may be, once you've decided who the key people involved in your estate plan will be, you'll have to talk to them. Roles like the Guardian or Power of Attorney for Personal Care can be emotionally taxing and a lot of work, so it's essential that you chat with these people to ensure they're willing and able to take on such a large responsibility. If you're nervous or uncomfortable to bring up the topic, think of how honoured they'll be that you've chosen them to play such a key role in your life, regardless if they're able to fulfill it or not.

3. Make A List Of Items For Gifting Purposes

Take a tour through your home to create a list of valuables and important items that you'd like to pass on to your loved ones. It's hard to think of all of the items you own on the spot (you probably own more than you think). That's why you should take a tour around your home and create a list of all valuables and items that you'd like to include in your Will.

Specific gifts, which are also known as Bequests, are identifiable pieces of property or monetary amounts that are gifted to individuals after you pass away. These gifts are not included in your residual estate. Common gifts include cash, jewelry, art, clothing, family heirlooms or mementos with special meaning.

In terms of the financials, don't worry about calculating your current net worth or the value of your RRSPs - a will encompasses your entire umbrella estate, meaning that everything falls under it (outside of those specific Bequests). It's also important to double check if you've assigned a beneficiary on any life insurance policies or registered savings accounts. If you have, those accounts will be transferred directly to those beneficiaries outside the estate.

4. Involve Your Spouse

If you're married or in a common-law relationship it's a good idea to sit down together when drafting your Will, especially when making key decisions like who will care for dependents.

While you and your spouse can create your wills together, you both need to have individual Wills signed and witnessed separately (if you create a Mirrored will, it just means that the wishes and roles are mirrored, but you will each have an individual set of documents).

5. Set Aside Some Quiet Time

When you're ready to sit down and create your will, find a quiet place with limited distractions that will allow you to focus and avoid making mistakes.

On average it takes between 20 minutes to a few hours to complete, depending on whether you visit a lawyer, use an online tool, or write your will yourself (called a Holograph Will). With [Willful](#) you can easily complete it within 20 minutes from beginning to end.

And you're done! It's truly not as complicated as many people expect it to be. Following these tips will help you [make a will](#) before Financial Literacy Month is over!