

Preparing for the Death of a Family Member

Have you thought about what to do to prepare for the death of your loved one? Most of us have not done so. Consequently, when our loved one dies, there seems to be a million things to do. The following list contains items that you can get in place, so that you will not be scrambling to find them at that extremely stressful time.

Get the following paperwork ready:

- marriage and birth certificates
- birth certificate of each dependent child
- insurance policies—health, life, etc
- deed and titles to property
- stock certificates
- bank books
- honorable discharge papers and/or VA claim number for a Veteran
- automobile title and registration papers
- loan and installment payment books and/or contracts
- information on credit cards
- legal paperwork—wills, trusts, etc
- tax returns
- if the person owns a business, documentation of business, partnership, etc
- information on union membership
- employer contact information—for pension plan, credit union and union death benefits information
- funeral and burial paperwork
- make a list of family/friends that you want to be there or to notify after death

This list is long and can seem overwhelming. You may consider talking with other family members to enlist their help in getting this paperwork together. Each member may be able to do part of the list for you.

After you have gathered this information, let the family know where all of the information is kept, so that they can have access to it, in case you are not there, at the time of your loved one's death.

As you are preparing this for your loved one, it is a good idea for you to gather this information for yourself, so that your family doesn't have to scramble to collect your paperwork.

What to do When a Family Member Dies

The following are general guidelines and may not be applicable in every situation.

- if the person dies in a hospital or nursing home, they will contact the mortuary or funeral home
- if the person was on hospice, contact the hospice
- if the person dies at home and it is expected, call their doctor
- if the person dies at home unattended or it was unexpected, call 911—be aware that the paramedics may try to resuscitate the person. It might help you to explore this issue now.
- if the person wanted to donate their body, contact the organization to whom they wanted to donate their body/tissue
- complete funeral/burial arrangements
- obtain several certified copies of the death certificate (see below)
- notify Social Security (800-772-1213 or 800-325-0778--TTY)
- check with the Veterans Administration for benefits
- notify the health insurance company—including MediCal and Medicare
- contact the life insurance company
- contact the employer
- notify the post office
- change bank accounts
- review credit cards and/or charge accounts
- meet with an attorney
- meet with an accountant
- if they owned a car, transfer the title
- notify the DMV

Information on death certificates—It is best to get several certified copies.

How to get them, if the person lived in Orange County:

- You can get immediate copies of the death certificate through the Orange County Health Care Agency (714-480-6700).
- After 60 days, you can get copies through the Clerk-Recorder Department of Vital Records in Santa Ana (877-445-8988).
- The copies can be obtained in person, by telephone, mail, fax, or on the internet.
- There is a fee for copies.
- The requester will have to sign a statement, stating that the requester is a person authorized to obtain the copies.

