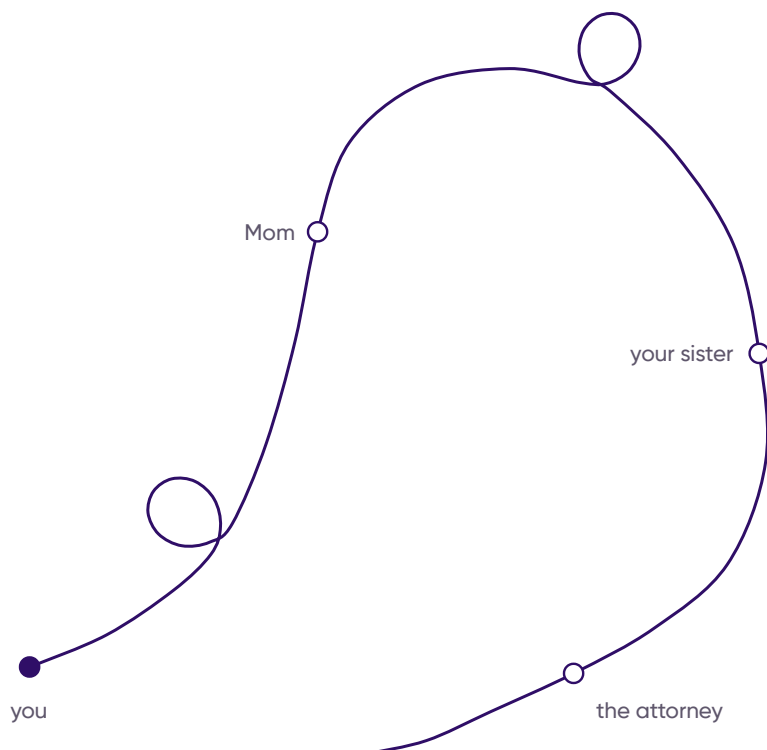


A family guide from KinWell

Before It *Matters*

A family guide to estate planning, family preparedness, and what happens when it matters.



Contents

Why now

PART ONE, UNDERSTAND

- 01 What estate planning really is
- 02 The documents that speak for you
- 03 Choosing your people
- 04 Everything else they will need

PART TWO, PREPARE

- 05 The conversations
- 06 How ready is your family?

PART THREE, WHEN IT MATTERS

- 07 How KinWell works
- 08 If someone cannot speak for themselves
- 09 After a death
- 10 Keeping it current

BACK MATTER

The family checklist

Glossary

A note on this guide

Why now

Most families start planning after something goes wrong. This guide is for starting before.

If you are reading this, you are probably the one people will call. Maybe a parent is getting older, or a scare at the hospital made you realize you do not know where anything is. Maybe you are raising kids of your own and wondering who would step in for them. You are not alone, and you are not too late.

KinWell began with a family that was too late. Our founder's grandfather was a generous, private man who kept his affairs in his head. When he died without a plan, his family spent years piecing together accounts, wishes, and decisions he had never written down. A blue folder everyone remembered was never found.

24%

of American adults said they have a will in 2025, down from 33% in 2022.

Source: Caring.com 2025 Wills and Estate Planning Survey (<https://www.caring.com/resources/wills-survey/>)

Most people know they should plan, and most have not. The most common reason is simple: they just have not gotten around to it. Planning asks us to picture a future we would rather not think about, and it is easy to put off when everyone is healthy.

The cost of waiting usually lands on the people left behind. Without a plan, a family may need a court to name someone to handle money or medical decisions. Bills go unpaid because nobody can access the accounts. Siblings guess at what a parent would have wanted, and sometimes they guess differently.

This guide walks through what estate planning really is, the documents and people involved, and how to talk about all of it with the people you love. The last part explains what KinWell does before a

crisis, in the moment it happens, and in the months after. You can read it straight through or jump to the chapter you need today.

“Planning is not about expecting the worst. It is about making sure the people you love are not left guessing.”

PART ONE

Understand

The documents, the people, and the information every family needs.

What estate planning really is

It is not only for the wealthy, and it is not only about death.

Estate planning sounds like something for people with lawyers on retainer and vacation homes to divide. In practice, it is much simpler and much more personal. An estate plan answers three questions: who will make decisions if you cannot, who will receive what you leave behind, and how your family will find what they need.

Your estate is everything you own and owe: a house or a lease, bank accounts, retirement savings, a car, life insurance, personal belongings, and debts. Almost every adult has one, even if it is small. What changes from family to family is how complicated it is to settle, and that depends far more on preparation than on wealth.

It covers life, not just death

A good plan protects you while you are alive. If a stroke, an accident, or dementia leaves you unable to manage your own affairs, the right documents let someone you trust pay your bills and talk with your doctors. Without them, your family may have to ask a court to appoint a guardian or conservator, which can take months, cost thousands of dollars, and put a judge in charge of choices you could have made yourself.

What happens without a plan

When someone dies without a will, they die “intestate,” and state law decides who inherits. Usually that means a spouse and children, in shares set by statute. That may not match what the person wanted, and it can leave out stepchildren, partners who were never married, close friends, and charities entirely. A court also chooses who will administer the estate.

Estate planning is also about the practical layer that no legal document covers: where the documents are kept, which accounts exist, who to call first, and what kind of service your parent wants. Families often have the legal pieces and still struggle because nobody can find them.

What a basic plan includes

- A will, and sometimes a living trust, that says who receives what and who is in charge.
- A durable financial power of attorney that lets someone manage money if you cannot.
- A healthcare power of attorney and living will, together called advance directives.
- A HIPAA authorization so doctors can share information with the people you choose.
- Up-to-date beneficiary designations on life insurance and retirement accounts.
- A clear record of accounts, documents, contacts, and wishes your family can actually find.

The legal documents are usually prepared by an estate planning attorney or a reputable online service. The record of everything else is where most families fall short, and it is the part you can start today.

How KinWell helps

Start with what you already have

- Cornerstone, KinWell's estate planning tool, walks you through assets, people, your team, wishes, and final details one step at a time.
- Your plan shows what is complete and what is missing, so you know where to focus next.
- KinWell organizes your plan. It does not replace an attorney, and it makes the conversation with one faster and less expensive.

Read the estate planning overview → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/help/estate-planning/overview>

The documents that speak for you

Five documents do most of the work. Here is what each one does, and what it does not.

Legal documents are how your wishes get carried out when you cannot say them yourself. Each one has a specific job, and a gap in any of them can leave your family stuck. Here are the five that matter most for most families.

The will

A will says who receives your property, names an executor to carry out your wishes, and names a guardian for any children under 18. After a death, the will is usually filed with a probate court, which oversees the process of paying debts and distributing what remains. A will only takes effect at death, and it has no power while you are alive.

A will also does not control everything. Accounts with a named beneficiary, property owned jointly with a right of survivorship, and assets held in a trust pass outside the will. We will come back to that, because it surprises a lot of families.

The living trust

A revocable living trust holds assets during your life and passes them to your beneficiaries at death without going through probate. You usually serve as your own trustee and keep full control. It can save time, keep details private, and help if you own property in more than one state. A trust only works for assets you actually move into it, so a trust that was signed but never funded may do very little.

The durable financial power of attorney

This document names an agent to handle money and paperwork if you cannot, from paying the mortgage to talking with the bank. “Durable” means it keeps working if you become incapacitated, which is the whole point. It ends at death, when the executor takes over. Without one, family members often cannot touch accounts in a parent’s name, even to pay a parent’s own bills.

The healthcare power of attorney and living will

A healthcare power of attorney names someone, often called a healthcare agent or proxy, to make medical decisions when you cannot. A living will records the treatment you would or would not want near the end of life, such as a ventilator or a feeding tube. Together they are called advance directives, and many states combine them in one form. Most states offer free forms, and you can change them at any time.

The HIPAA authorization

Privacy rules limit what doctors and hospitals can share. A HIPAA authorization lets the people you name receive your medical information, which helps adult children who are coordinating care but are not the named healthcare agent. It is a short form, and it prevents a lot of frustrating phone calls.

“A plan nobody can find is almost as hard on a family as no plan at all.”

State rules differ

Each state sets its own rules for how these documents must be signed, witnessed, or notarized, and some states require their own forms for advance directives. A document made in one state is usually honored in another, but it is worth a review after a move.

NIA: Advance directives for health care (<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/advance-care-planning/advance-care-planning-advance-directives-health-care>)

CFPB: Managing someone else’s money (<https://www.consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/managing-someone-elses-money/>)

Once the documents exist, the next job is making sure the right people can find them. Keep originals somewhere safe and known, such as a fireproof box or with the attorney who drafted them. Give copies of the healthcare documents to the healthcare agent and to your doctor.

How KinWell helps

Keep every document where your family can find it

- Upload wills, trusts, powers of attorney, and advance directives to your encrypted KinWell document vault, organized by category.
- SageLens reads an uploaded document and pulls out key details, like a named executor, so you can review them in your plan.
- Share a single document with a doctor or attorney through a secure link instead of email attachments.

How the document vault works → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/help/estate-planning/document-vault>

Choosing your people

A plan is only as good as the people who carry it out. Here is who you will need, and how to choose them well.

Every estate plan names people. Some will make decisions if your parent cannot. Some will settle things after a death. Some will receive what is left behind. Choosing them is often harder than signing the documents, because it means picturing a future you would rather not.

- **EXECUTOR**

Carries out the will after a death, pays final bills and taxes, and distributes what remains.

- **FINANCIAL AGENT**

Manages money and paperwork during life if your parent cannot.

- **HEALTHCARE AGENT**

Talks with doctors and makes medical decisions when your parent cannot.

- **TRUSTEE**

Manages assets held in a trust and follows its instructions.

- **GUARDIAN**

Raises children under 18 if both parents are gone.

- **BENEFICIARIES**

The people and causes who receive what is left.

The executor (sometimes called a personal representative) carries out the will. They file it with the court, pay final bills and taxes, and distribute what remains. It is real work that can take a year or more. Pick someone organized, trusted by the family, and willing to say yes.

A financial power of attorney agent manages money and paperwork while your parent is alive but unable to do it themselves. A healthcare agent speaks with doctors and makes medical decisions in the same situation. These can be the same person, but they do not have to be, and many families choose the sibling who lives nearby for one role and the one who is good with numbers for the other.

If there are children under 18, a guardian is named in the will to raise them. Beneficiaries are the people who receive assets. One detail surprises many families: the beneficiary listed on a life insurance policy or retirement account usually overrides whatever the will says.

“The beneficiary form on a 401(k) usually beats the will. Check both.”

How to choose well

- Ask first. Nobody should learn they are the executor at the funeral.
- Name a backup for every role, in case the first choice cannot serve.
- Think about temperament as much as closeness. Calm and organized often matters more than oldest.
- Consider distance. A healthcare agent across the country can still serve, but it is harder.
- Tell the rest of the family who was chosen and why, so the decision does not surprise anyone later.

State rules differ

Some states require an executor who lives out of state to post a bond or name a local agent. Community property states, like California, Texas, and Arizona, treat assets acquired during marriage differently. Check your state court's self-help site or a local attorney.

IRS: Community property states (<https://www.irs.gov/publications/p555>)

Find free legal help in your state (<https://www.lawhelp.org/>)

“If you were in the hospital and couldn’t speak for yourself, who would you want talking to your doctors?”

“Have you asked anyone to be your executor? Do they know?”

“When did you last check who is listed on your life insurance and retirement accounts?”

How KinWell helps

Keep everyone’s role in one place

- Cornerstone’s Team tab records your executor, trustee, healthcare agent, financial power of attorney, and guardian, with contact details.
- The People tab tracks beneficiaries and specific gifts, so you can compare them with your account beneficiary forms.
- Your Family Readiness Score flags missing roles, like a healthcare agent, before they matter.

Read the beneficiary and fiduciary guide → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/help/estate-planning/beneficiary-fiduciary-guide>

Everything else they will need

The legal documents are only part of it. Your family also needs a map.

Ask anyone who has settled a parent's estate what took the most time, and the answer is rarely the will. It is finding things. Which bank? Was there a second life insurance policy? Who holds the mortgage? What is the passcode to the phone that receives every verification text?

This chapter is about the map: a simple, current record of what exists and where it lives. It does not need to be perfect. A partial list your family can find is worth far more than a complete one nobody knows about.

Money and property

- Bank and credit union accounts, including any small or old ones.
- Retirement accounts, pensions, and annuities, with their beneficiaries.
- Life insurance, including policies through an employer.
- Real estate, vehicles, and storage units, and where the titles and deeds are.
- Debts: mortgage, loans, credit cards, and anything co-signed.
- Regular bills and automatic payments that will need to be stopped or moved.

People to call

Write down the professionals who already know your parent's situation: the attorney who drafted the documents, a financial advisor, an accountant, the insurance agent, and the primary care doctor. Add the family members, close friends, and faith community who should hear the news early.

A digital life

So much now lives online: email, photos, banking, subscriptions, social media, and the phone that holds it all. Most states have laws that let a person give their executor or agent access to digital accounts, and several large platforms let you name a legacy contact ahead of time. Turn those settings on while you can.

Be careful with passwords. A list of passwords in an unencrypted document or an email is a security risk. A password manager with an emergency access feature, plus a note telling your family it exists, is safer and easier to keep current.

The everyday details

Pets and who will take them. The key to the house and the code to the alarm. Medications and the pharmacy. The neighbor who checks in. These details never appear in a will, and they are often the first things a family needs in an emergency.

How KinWell helps

Build the map once, and keep it current

- Cornerstone's Assets tab records accounts, policies, and property by type, so your family has one list instead of a box of statements.
- The Details tab holds the notes that do not fit anywhere else, from the pet's vet to where the spare key is.
- KinWell sends reminders to keep vital documents current, and Sage, KinWell's AI guide, can walk you through each section by voice or text.

See the probate readiness checklist → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/help/estate-planning/probate-readiness-checklist>

PART TWO

Prepare

Turning knowledge into a family plan everyone understands.

The conversations

The hardest part of planning is usually the first sentence. Here is how to start.

Many adult children worry that bringing up a will or a funeral will upset a parent or sound like they are after something. Many parents worry about burdening their kids. So both sides wait, and the conversation happens in a hospital hallway instead of at the kitchen table.

The good news is that most parents are relieved once the conversation starts. It rarely needs to be one big talk. It works better as a series of small ones, over weeks or months, each focused on a single question.

Ways to begin

- Start with yourself. "I just finished my own will, and it made me wonder about yours" takes the pressure off.
- Use something that already happened: a friend's illness, a news story, a holiday visit.
- Ask questions instead of giving instructions. You are there to learn what they want.
- Choose a calm moment, not the middle of a crisis or a crowded holiday dinner.
- Include your siblings early, so nobody feels left out or blindsided later.

Healthcare wishes

Talk about what matters most to your parent if they became seriously ill. Some people care most about staying at home, some about being free of pain, and some about trying every treatment available. Knowing those values helps a healthcare agent make decisions that feel right, even in situations no form could predict.

Final wishes

Burial or cremation, a religious service or a gathering at home, favorite songs, who should speak, and where donations should go. These choices can feel small, but families who know them say it made an unbearable week a little more bearable. Funeral homes must give you an itemized price list, and you only have to buy what you choose.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

“What would a good day look like for you if you were very sick?”

“Is there anything you have always wanted us to know but never said?”

“If we ever had to plan your service, what would you want it to feel like?”

“Where do you keep your important papers? Could I find them if I had to?”

HELPFUL RESOURCES

The Conversation Project → [\(https://theconversationproject.org/\)](https://theconversationproject.org/)

FTC: Shopping for funeral services → [\(https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/shopping-funeral-services\)](https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/shopping-funeral-services)

How KinWell helps

Write it down while you can still ask

- Cornerstone's Wishes tab records final wishes and healthcare preferences in your parent's own words.
- Invite family into Roundtable, KinWell's family space, so everyone sees the same plan instead of a different version from each conversation.
- Send a relative a link to add their own details, so a parent can fill in what they know without logging in to anything new.

Join the KinWell Circle community → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/kinwell-circle>

How ready is your family?

A quick way to see where you stand, and what to do next.

It is easy to feel like you are either completely prepared or not prepared at all. Most families are somewhere in between: a will from fifteen years ago, a healthcare form that was never signed, an executor who was never told. Seeing the gaps clearly is the first step to closing them.

Five things to check

- Family information: names, contact details, and relationships for the people who matter.
- The plan itself: assets, beneficiaries, and wishes recorded somewhere your family can find.
- Key roles: an executor, a healthcare agent, a financial power of attorney, and a guardian if there are minors.
- Key documents: a will and advance directives that are signed, current, and findable.
- Access: a way for the right people to reach the plan in an emergency.

Do not try to fix everything in one weekend. Pick the single biggest gap, usually a missing healthcare agent or power of attorney, and close it this month. Then pick the next one.

“Done is better than perfect. A partial plan your family can find beats a perfect one that does not exist.”

How KinWell helps

Know your score, then raise it

- The free Family Readiness quiz takes a few minutes and emails you a score with a short action plan.
- Inside KinWell, your Family Readiness Score updates as you add roles, documents, and details, and flags any area that needs attention.
- Each flag links straight to the step that fixes it.

Take the Family Readiness quiz → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/family-readiness>

PART THREE

When it matters

What KinWell does before a crisis, in the moment it happens, and in the months after.

How KinWell works

One place for the plan, the people, and the next steps, before, during, and after.

KinWell is a family preparedness platform. It does not write legal documents and it is not a law firm. It is the place where everything a family needs comes together, kept current over time, and opened to the right people at the right moment.

Before

Organize documents, people, and wishes. Name trusted contacts and your executor.

When

Trusted contacts request emergency access. You can approve it right away, or it opens after a 7-day waiting period.

After

Your executor opens your plan. The family shares one checklist in Settle, with tasks, reminders, and updates.

Before: build the plan

Most of KinWell's work happens long before anyone needs it. Cornerstone guides you through your assets, people, team, wishes, and final details. The document vault keeps legal and personal papers encrypted and organized. Roundtable holds your family: who they are, how they are related, and what role each person plays. When you are done, you can export a complete summary as a PDF for your attorney or your files.

Sage, KinWell's AI guide, can help at any point. Ask a question in plain language, in English or Spanish, by voice or text, and Sage can explain a term, suggest what to do next, or walk you

through a section step by step.

When: open the plan to the right people

A plan only helps if the right people can reach it. KinWell lets you name trusted contacts who can request emergency access. You can approve or deny each request, and if you cannot respond, access opens on its own after a waiting period. Chapter 08 explains how that works.

After: carry it out together

When a family member dies, KinWell shifts from planning to helping. The executor can open the plan that was shared with them. Sage offers a checklist for the first days and can help write an obituary or create a memorial page. Settle, KinWell's probate workspace, gives the family one shared list of tasks for the months that follow. Chapter 09 walks through it.

If you work with a financial advisor who uses KinWell, their team may also help coordinate these steps with you.

KinWell is built with privacy at its core. Documents are encrypted, you choose exactly who sees what, and access for others is limited to what you allow.

If someone cannot speak for themselves

A fall, a stroke, a sudden diagnosis. What your family needs in the first hours, and how they get it.

Incapacity is the crisis families plan for least, and it is often the first one they face. A parent is in the hospital, unable to talk. Someone needs the insurance card, the list of medications, the name of the healthcare agent, and a copy of the advance directive, and they need it now.

What your family will need first

- The healthcare power of attorney and living will, to give to the hospital.
- Insurance cards and ID.
- A list of medications, doctors, and allergies.
- The financial power of attorney, so bills keep getting paid.
- Contact details for the rest of the family.

How emergency access works in KinWell

In KinWell, you name the people you trust as emergency contacts. When one of them needs your information, they request emergency access. KinWell emails you right away, and you can approve or deny the request.

Every trusted contact has a 7-day waiting period. When a request comes in, you can approve it right away or deny it. If you do not respond before the 7 days are up, access opens automatically, which is exactly what you would want if you are unable to respond.

Emergency access is read-only and lasts for 7 days. It covers the essentials: legal and ID documents, insurance, estate information, and emergency logistics. Your contacts can see what they need to help, without being able to change anything.

“The waiting period is a promise to yourself. If you can answer, you stay in control. If you cannot, your family is not locked out.”

Who to choose as a trusted contact

Because access can open without you, choose people you would trust with these papers on your worst day: often a spouse, your healthcare agent, or the adult child who lives closest. If someone's role in your life changes, you can remove them at any time.

If you own a business, KinWell's Founder's Vault adds a regular check-in and a handover plan for the people who would keep it running.

How KinWell helps

Set it up in five minutes

- Add trusted contacts in KinWell. If you cannot respond to a request, they can open your essentials after 7 days.
- Upload your advance directives and insurance cards so they are ready to share.
- Tell your contacts they have been added, so they know where to go.

Learn about Founder's Vault → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/founders-vault>

After a death

What to do in the first days, the first weeks, and the months after, and how KinWell carries some of the weight.

There is no right way to grieve, and there is no need to do everything at once. Most tasks after a death can wait days or weeks. This chapter is here for when you are ready, one step at a time.

The first days

- If the death was unexpected and at home, call 911. If your loved one was in hospice, call the hospice team.
- Contact a funeral home. They will help with transportation, the death certificate, and often reporting the death to Social Security.
- Tell close family and friends, and ask one person to help spread the news.
- Secure the home, care for any pets, and collect the mail.
- Look for the will, final wishes, and any prepaid funeral arrangements.

The first weeks

- Order several certified copies of the death certificate. Banks, insurers, and agencies will each want one.
- The executor files the will with the probate court in the county where your loved one lived, if probate is needed.
- Notify banks, insurance companies, employers, and pension providers.
- Contact life insurance companies to start claims for beneficiaries.

- Avoid paying debts from your own money. Family members usually are not personally responsible for a loved one's debts, though the estate may be. Ask an attorney if you are unsure.

The months after

If the estate goes through probate, the executor will take inventory of what was owned, notify creditors, pay valid debts and taxes, and eventually distribute what remains. A final income tax return is due for the year of death. The process often takes several months to more than a year, depending on the state and how organized things were.

State rules differ

Many states offer a simpler process for small estates, and some assets never go through probate at all. The dollar limits, deadlines, and forms vary widely. Your county probate court or an estate attorney can tell you which route applies.

Find your state court (<https://www.usa.gov/state-courts>)

IRS: Final tax return for a deceased person (<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/file-the-final-income-tax-returns-of-a-deceased-person>)

How KinWell helps after a loss

When a family marks a loved one as deceased in KinWell, either in Roundtable or by telling Sage, KinWell offers a gentle set of next steps. Sage can start a farewell checklist for the first days, help write an obituary with Scribe, and create a memorial page with Monument where friends can share stories and photos.

If your loved one turned on sharing with their executor, the named executor can open their Cornerstone plan: the assets, people, wishes, and details they recorded. Instead of searching drawers and old statements, the executor starts with a map.

Settle: one shared workspace for the estate

Settle is KinWell's probate workspace. You start by adding the state, county, and what you already know, and "I'm not sure" is a fine answer. Settle then offers a starter checklist of general steps with links to official resources.

- Managers assign tasks to family members and record confirmed due dates.
- Assigned relatives update progress, add notes, and link the documents they can already see.
- The family posts updates in one place and chooses instant, daily, or weekly email summaries.
- Reminders go out 7 days before a due date, on the day, and once if it becomes overdue.

Settle never fills in legal deadlines for you, because those depend on your court and your situation. It is an organizing aid, not legal advice, and finishing the checklist does not close the estate legally. When the work is done, a manager closes the workspace, and it can be reopened later if something comes up.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

[Read the Settle guide](#) → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/help/estate-planning/settle>

[The farewell checklist](#) → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/help/estate-planning/farewell-checklist>

[Grief support resources](#) → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/resources/grief-support>

Keeping it current

A plan is a living thing. Here is when to look at it again.

A plan made ten years ago may name an executor who has since moved away, a beneficiary who has died, or a guardian for children who are now adults. Plans drift out of date quietly, and the gap only shows when it is too late to fix.

Review your plan after

- A marriage, divorce, or new partner.
- A birth, adoption, or a child turning 18.
- The death or illness of anyone named in the plan.
- A move to a new state.
- A big change in what you own, like selling a house or receiving an inheritance.
- A new diagnosis or a change in health.

Even without a big change, look at the plan once a year. Check beneficiary forms on insurance and retirement accounts, confirm the people you named are still willing, and update contact details. It usually takes less than an hour.

How KinWell helps

Let KinWell remember for you

- KinWell reminds you to review vital documents, so nothing quietly expires.
- Your Family Readiness Score shows when something important is missing again.
- Update your plan in one place, and everyone you have shared it with sees the current version.

See KinWell plans and pricing → <https://www.bestfarewell.com/pricing>

Start before it matters

Begin with one thing: a single document, one role, or one conversation. Every step you take now is one less thing your family has to figure out later.

www.bestfarewell.com/sign-up

The family checklist

Print this page and work through it over a few weeks. Every box you check makes the hard days easier.

Documents

- ☐ Will or living trust is signed and current
- ☐ Durable financial power of attorney
- ☐ Healthcare power of attorney and living will
- ☐ HIPAA authorization
- ☐ Beneficiary forms checked on insurance and retirement accounts

Information

- ☐ Accounts, policies, and property listed
- ☐ Debts and automatic payments listed
- ☐ Key professionals and contacts recorded
- ☐ Digital accounts and legacy contacts set up
- ☐ Originals stored somewhere safe and known

People

- ☐ Executor named, asked, and willing
- ☐ Healthcare agent and financial agent named, with backups
- ☐ Guardian named for any children under 18
- ☐ The rest of the family knows who was chosen

Wishes and access

- ☐ Healthcare wishes discussed and written down
- ☐ Final wishes recorded
- ☐ Trusted contacts can reach the plan in an emergency
- ☐ A yearly review is on the calendar

Glossary

Advance directive

A legal document, such as a living will or healthcare power of attorney, that records medical wishes and takes effect only if you cannot speak for yourself.

Beneficiary

A person or organization that receives assets.

Community property

A system used in nine states where most property acquired during marriage belongs equally to both spouses.

Estate

Everything a person owns and owes at death.

Fiduciary

Anyone legally required to act in another person's best interest, such as an executor, trustee, or agent.

HIPAA authorization

A form that lets doctors share your medical information with the people you name.

Living trust

A trust you create and control during life that passes assets to beneficiaries without probate.

Payable on death (POD)

A designation on a bank or investment account that passes it directly to a named person at death.

Trustee

The person who manages assets held in a trust.

Agent

The person named in a power of attorney to act for you. Also called an attorney-in-fact.

Beneficiary designation

The form on an insurance policy or account that names who receives it. It usually overrides the will.

Durable power of attorney

A power of attorney that stays in effect if you become incapacitated. It ends at death.

Executor

The person named in a will to settle the estate. Also called a personal representative.

Guardian

A person appointed to care for a minor child, or by a court to make decisions for an incapacitated adult.

Intestate

Dying without a valid will. State law then decides who inherits.

Living will

A document that records the medical treatment you would or would not want near the end of life.

Probate

The court process for validating a will, paying debts, and distributing an estate.

A note on this guide

This guide is general information, not legal, tax, or financial advice. Laws vary by state and change over time. Talk with an estate planning attorney about your situation. KinWell is a family preparedness platform by BestFarewell and does not provide legal services.