



ENCHANTED MOURNINGS END OF LIFE PLANNING

YOUR GUIDE FOR COMPLETING YOUR
ADVANCE DIRECTIVE

GRIEF WITCH
SOUL DOULA | DEATH DOULA
END OF LIFE PLANNING



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HELLO,

And welcome! I appreciate and honor the courage it takes to be here, so I humbly thank you for taking the time to consider end of life planning. End of life planning is often a topic people hesitate to approach, understandably. No one is comfortable talking about death, thinking about death, or confronting their own mortality. And yet, we all will some day. Not talking about or making plans for it doesn't do us or our loved ones any favors. Maybe you've experienced a loss of a loved one and you've been called on to make difficult decisions, or tried to understand (or find) a living will, maybe you've had to hire an estate attorney and learn about probate. Maybe you haven't yet been through his experience. But one thing we all know for sure, we will at one point or another be initiated into this process.

Planning for our death is one of the most important gifts we can give to ourselves and our loved ones. By taking accountability and responsibility for our own death, we ease the decision making process for our family. Essentially, it gives our loved ones space for their grief. A common misconception about end of life planning is that you need to be actively dying, or have received a terminal diagnosis, to begin end of life planning. This is not the case. In fact, I would argue that making plans while dying is actually harder. We don't wait to make birth plans when we're in labor, nor should we wait to make end of life plans when we're dying.

It's likely that you've downloaded this guide because either you or someone you know is at this threshold. I'm tenderly holding space for you on your journey. It's my goal to provide a compassionate, thorough, end of life planning guide to ease this process for you, take out the guesswork, and to give you step-by-step directions, knowing that it will slightly vary based on location and everyone's own unique and personal journey.

DYING IS SACRED WORK

In our culture, we aren't accustomed to thinking about or talking about death. In fact, great care has gone into hiding away and shunning death from our view that we don't even notice how absent it is from our daily lives.

With this in mind, as you go through this guide, I want you to go only as fast as feels safe for your nervous system.

Remember to take deep breaths, gently move your body, and drink lots of water while you do this work.

Please reach out to your family, friends, community and/or professionals if you find yourself having difficulty processing this rite of passage. This doesn't mean something is wrong, it means that we need support, and that's ok. We aren't meant to do this alone.

My wish for you is to feel safe, grounded, anchored, and tethered in this work.



UPCOMING SECTIONS

- 1 - What is EOL Planning?
- 2 - Advance Directive & Living Will
- 3 - Financial & Legal Considerations
- 4 - Legacy & Life Review
- 5 - Funerals
- 6 - Disposition of the Body
- 7 - Storage & Updates
- 8 - A Final Note

WHAT IS END OF LIFE PLANNING?

In a nutshell: end of life planning is comprehensive planning for the final phase of life, whether yours or someone else's. It's the process of organizing and documenting preferences for the type of care received, how affairs will be handled and generally what happens before, during and after death.



TAKING OWNERSHIP AND
RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR
OWN DEATH IS AN ACT OF
LOVE.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Enables you to make informed decisions about your care
- Ensures your wishes and values are respected
- Honors and reclaims death as a sacred final rite of passage
- Provides clarity and peace of mind for you and your loved ones
- Relieves stress, alleviates confusion, reduces chance of conflict

ADVANCE DIRECTIVE & LIVING WILL

An advance directive, also called a living will, is a general term for spoken or written instructions about future medical care if you become incapacitated. Though it sounds similar, it is not what you think of when you typically think of the word “will.”

- A living will is a legal document that outlines your wishes for medical treatment in the event you are unable to communicate. It does not allocate disbursement of your estate.
- A POA is typically used when an individual is temporarily unable to make decisions due to illness, injury, or absence.
- A DPOA is necessary to prepare for a time when you might become incapacitated from an accident or sudden illness, to choose the person you trust to control your healthcare, family, business, and financial decisions while you are unable to manage them yourself, or in response to a degenerative disease diagnosis.
- This person is also called: healthcare agent, surrogate decision maker, healthcare proxy, or attorney-in-fact.
- You continue to make your own health care decisions for as long as you are able; only when you aren't able to communicate your wishes is your DPOA able to act.
- You should always list 1 or 2 alternates in case the primary is unable or unwilling to serve.
- Once you've decided who you'd like your POA/DPOA to be, discuss your plans with them., give them a copy for their records, let them know where your records are and make sure your medical team has a copy on file as well. Our plans don't do us any good if no one knows about them.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Who in my life do I trust to make decisions on my behalf if I could not speak for myself?
- What medical interventions do you want to be performed in order to sustain your life?
- What do you believe constitutes “quality of life?”
- When does quality of life outweigh medical care/treatment?

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES BY STATE

FINANCIAL & LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Will:** a document that outlines how your property, finances, and assets (your estate) will be distributed after your death.
- **Trust:** A legal arrangement where one person (the trustee) holds and manages assets on behalf of another. At times, placing your assets in a trust can prevent your estate from going to probate (timely and costly) and can protect against paying estate tax.
- **Durable Power of Attorney for Finances:** Appoints someone to make financial decisions on your behalf if you are unable to do so. This may be the same person as your healthcare agent, or it may be someone different.
- **Beneficiary Designations:** Ensures your insurance policies, retirement accounts, and other financial assets have up-to-date beneficiary information.
- Make a list of all your accounts, account numbers, log-ins, passwords, so that your financial proxy is able to easily find and locate your affairs.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Who do you trust to manage your finances?
- Do you have life insurance?
- Who are your beneficiaries? Do they know?
- Who will be taking care of your estate?
- What is the estate tax in your state?
- Do you know the differences between a trust and a will and the pros/cons of either?

LEGACY & LIFE REVIEW

Legacy - it's the story, values and meaning of our life that we leave behind to our loved ones and community.

Legacy work refers to any activities, projects, writings that individuals and/or families engage in to create something, usually tangible, that can serve as a lasting memory for their loved ones. Legacy work can be as small or as big, or as creative or simple as you'd like it to be. There is no right or wrong way to engage in legacy work and of course, it's completely optional.

Some examples of legacy work might be: creating videos, writing letters, art, sharing important family stories or lore, genealogy, etc.

Life Review - the act of reflecting on the overall arch of our lives, discussing the major themes and storylines, and generally how we make meaning of our time here. You might find a list of questions helpful to get you started.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What was it like growing up in your family?
- What are you most proud of?
- What has brought you so much joy?
- What was a transformative moment in your life?
- Go through the decades - talk about what it was like when you were 5, 15, 25, etc.

FUNERAL OR MEMORIAL PLANNING

A funeral and/or memorial is a well known and commonly practiced ritual across many different traditions - and they can be as unique and individual as the person who's died.

Is there a special way your family/ancestors have been traditionally honored? Would you like to do something similar, or something new or different? What does that look like?

Do you want a traditional funeral, a celebration of life, a home funeral, or no service at all?

Do you have preferences about burial, cremation or other eco-friendly options like green burial or aquamation? Did you even know there were other options? These options and others are discussed on the next page.

Obituary: Would you like an obituary written? What message do you want to convey about your life? Would you like to write it yourself or have someone else write it?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How would you like to be honored? Any special practices or rituals?
- What about the service would make it unique to who you are?
- Have you selected a funeral home and/or funeral director? Have you prepaid for a funeral? (If applicable)
- What are the roles and responsibilities of funeral directors in your state?

DISPOSITION OF THE BODY

There are several different methods to dispose of a body after death. The two most commonly known are conventional burial and cremation. However, it's important to know what all options are so that you can make an informed decision.

Natural Organic Reduction/Human Composting: Based on green burial, but typically in urban areas. Bodies are placed in a vessel with wood chips and straw and over approximately 30 days the body recomposes and creates about one cubic yard of soil that can be used to grow new life.

Aquamation: Alkaline hydrolysis, or, water cremation, is where the body is placed in a mixture of potassium hydroxide and water for about 4 hours. Everything dissolves and what is left is a softened skeleton. The bones are ground up and given back to the family or loved ones.

Green Burials: A method that does as little as possible to interfere with the natural decomposition of the body. Bodies are buried approximately 3ft underground. Bodies are typically naked, in a shroud, soft wood boxes or in cardboard so they break down at a similar rate of the body.

Donation to Science: The body is donated to science for research and education purposes, usually linked to a local university. The deceased cannot also be an organ donor. The cremated remains are returned to the family after it has completed its purpose.

STORAGE & UPDATES

When you've completed your documents, put them somewhere that is safe, a place you'll remember, and a place that others will know to look. Again, our plans don't do us any good if no one knows them or knows how to access them. So please be sure to TELL SOMEONE your thoughts, ideas, plans. If you do not have anyone to talk to about your wishes, speak to someone on your medical team, or consider working with a death doula.

Make sure to regularly update these documents at least once a year or after any major life event, such as a wedding, birth of a child, death of a loved one, purchase of a new home, etc.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How will you be documenting and organizing your affairs?
- Where will they be kept?
- Does anyone in your community know about these documents?

A FINAL NOTE:

Most fears can be traced back to a fear of death; fear of the unknown, fear of intimacy, fear of surrendering, fear of closeness and separation. These fears can all be traced back to the fear of the inevitable: leaving this mortal body and moving onto the next realm, whatever that may be.

Death is a transfer of energy, yet in this society, we have been conditioned to fear it and hide it away, especially in the West. This leads me to wonder -

WHAT IF DEATH
WASN'T SOMETHING
TO FEAR?

I know, it seems impossible. However I will say that confronting our fears about death and dying is some of the greatest spiritual work I've ever done. Making friends with death (ok, maybe not friends, but at least accepting that it's in the room) has been a deeply transformative and freeing experience. Death requires total presence. It's deep threshold work, and not dissimilar to welcoming in new life.

Confronting fears of the unknown, loss and death is the key to opening the door to this transformative power.



Thank you for your time, attention and willingness to engage in discussion about death and dying.

It's sacred work and it matters.

Please reach out with any questions or to inquire about the services I offer.

Until then,

I'm holding tender space for you on your journey.

Many blessings,

Lindsay Wilkison

Grief Witch | Soul Doula | Death Doula

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RESOURCES:

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Foundation

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

(NHPCO).

CaringInfo.org – A program of NHPCO

Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC).

American Academy of Hospice & Palliative Medicine

(AAHPM).

Alzheimer's Association

Hospice Foundation of America (HFA).

Compassus

The Conversation Project

Home Funeral Alliance

Green Burial Council

Communication at the End of Life

End-in Mind Project

Death Cafe'

Death Over Dinner