



money date #5

Health & wealth

We're fearful about our financial futures and our health, these days. And while it's tempting to assume the worst won't happen for a long, long time, financial planners like Tim Sugar of Neider & Boucher in Madison, WI believe it's important for everyone -- young couples included -- to consider estate planning issues sooner rather than later.

It's a wise idea to consult a professional estate planning attorney about setting up a will or a trust for your family.

And before you say, woah, that's for rich people, Sugar would like to dispel that myth. Everyone needs to make plans for the future. A will is less expensive to create, but it will go into probate and take time after your passing. A trust takes more time and is more expensive up front, but it doesn't need court supervision, which makes it easier for your family members in the future.

Would you believe that there is an official, recognized category called "important papers"?

These include everything from financial and legal papers to identification documents, titles and ownership documents, marriage, birth, adoption, divorce or death certificates, safe deposit box inventories, powers of attorney, investment records and insurance policies, taxes, wills and trusts.

There are checklists offered by various organizations, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which offers advice on how to create an Emergency Financial First Aid Kit to organize important information and papers. Depending on your life stage, you might not have all of them, but the more you can get together, the better.

Do you use a password program with a master password that unlocks access to all your other passwords?

If not, you might consider using one -- and putting the master password in a safe deposit box, home safe or somewhere else for safe keeping.

Designating a Health Care Power of Attorney and creating a Living Will (also known as an advance healthcare directive) is the best way to make sure your healthcare wishes are known.

It's a tough one to think about, but this saves much heartache for you and those who love you down the line. Again, consulting a professional is best here, but there are free downloadable versions online. Whatever you do, make sure that people can find the documents if and when it is necessary. These items should be included with your important papers!

WHAT IS A WILL?

A will is a legal document that coordinates the distribution of your assets after death and appoints guardians for minor children.

A will allows you to communicate your wishes clearly and precisely.

WHAT IS A TRUST?

A trust is a fiduciary arrangement that allows a third party, or trustee, to hold assets on behalf of a beneficiary or beneficiaries.

Trusts can be arranged in many ways and can specify exactly how and when the assets pass to the beneficiaries.

WHAT IS HEALTH CARE POWER OF ATTORNEY?

A health care power of attorney names someone that you trust to act as your agent if you are unable to speak for yourself. You can only choose one person to speak for you on health care matters.

WHAT IS A LIVING WILL?

A living will is a written statement detailing a person's desires regarding their medical treatment in circumstance where he or she are no longer able to express informed consent.

For now, we're encouraging you to get everything organized and take the first steps toward contacting a professional who can help you make the best individual decision for you