

# Planning with Clarity

8 PRACTICAL STEPS TO  
PREPARE YOUR FAMILY  
FOR WHAT'S NEXT

®

# Clarity Doesn't Have to Be Complicated

No matter how much wealth you've built, one of the most valuable things you can leave your loved ones is clarity.

Yet, conversations about what happens after you're gone are often the most avoided aspect of wealth planning. These discussions can feel emotional, uncomfortable and, at times, overwhelming. But here's the good news: getting organized and involving your loved ones doesn't have to be all-or-nothing.

You don't need to overhaul your entire financial life in one sitting. Sometimes, the most helpful steps are the simple ones—like making sure someone knows where your key documents are or identifying who to call in an emergency. A few small actions today can prevent a great deal of confusion, stress and uncertainty later.

This guide offers practical, uncomplicated ways to include those who matter most to you in your planning process. We'll explain why family involvement is not just thoughtful—but essential. You'll also find actionable steps to help get started and learn how American Trust Wealth can support you each step of the way.

## Why Your Family's Involvement Isn't Optional—It's Foundational

Your financial life doesn't stop when your life ends, and that reality can catch families off guard. Many people don't realize, for example, that power of attorney authority ends at the moment of death. Without proper planning and communication, this can lead to confusion or even legal complications.

During periods of grief, emotions run high and decision-making becomes harder. Trying to navigate financial and legal responsibilities in the middle of mourning only adds stress. Establishing a shared understanding before something happens is often far easier than trying to create clarity in a crisis. Involving your family ahead of time allows them to understand your intentions, prepares them to carry out their roles and ultimately gives everyone involved more peace of mind.

### THE COST OF INACTION

When families aren't included in the planning process, the consequences can be significant—and stressful. Without access to key documents or account information, loved ones may struggle to cover immediate expenses like funeral costs, bills or mortgage payments. If no one is sure who's responsible for what, important responsibilities can fall through the cracks.

Through client relationships, crossover opportunities and organic growth efforts, many trust departments have built strong retirement plan books of business. Yet in the new commoditized environment, these provide nowhere near the number of plans and participants needed to be profitable. Legal headaches can mount quickly in the absence of clear instructions, sometimes leading to probate court proceedings, attorney fees or even intra-family disputes. Tax-saving opportunities may be missed, resulting in a larger portion of your estate going to the IRS rather than your heirs. In some cases, disorganized records or unknown accounts go unclaimed entirely.

Perhaps the hardest part is the emotional toll. Without knowing your wishes, your family could be forced to make difficult decisions under pressure—about your care, your finances and your legacy. These circumstances can spark misunderstandings and conflict among loved ones, and too often, the people, causes or values you cared about most are overlooked simply because you never had the chance to explain them.

## THE BENEFITS OF INVOLVING YOUR FAMILY

When you include your family in your planning while you're still here, you give them the tools and clarity they'll need when the time comes. They'll understand your wishes and expectations, and they'll know who to contact, what to do and how to carry out your plan.

This level of preparation helps ensure that financial, legal and personal responsibilities are transferred smoothly. It also builds trust, limits misunderstandings and keeps relationships intact. Involving your loved ones early isn't just about logistics—it's a way to bring your family closer together.

It's also an opportunity to empower the next generation. Whether your children or grandchildren will one day inherit your wealth or simply manage your affairs, early exposure to the planning process and financial education can help them step into those responsibilities with greater confidence. And perhaps most importantly, it brings peace of mind—for them and for you. While there is much value in including your family in the process early, you may be wondering how to start. Fortunately, there are practical, meaningful ways to take the initiative and begin this process on your own. Whether you're just beginning to organize your affairs or refining an existing plan, these steps can help you open the lines of communication, set clear expectations, and lay a strong foundation for your family's future.



# 8 Practical Steps You Can Take Today

## 1. MAKE SURE DOCUMENTS ARE EASY TO FIND

Wills, trusts, life insurance policies, power of attorney forms and medical directives are only useful if your family can locate them. Keep copies in a central, secure place, and let at least one trusted person know how to access them.

## 2. CLARIFY WHOS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT

The people you've designated to act on your behalf—your executor, power of attorney and health care proxy—should understand their roles before they need to step in. A clear conversation now can prevent confusion later.

## 3. TALK ABOUT YOUR PLAN BEFORE IT IS URGENT

Avoid making your family guess what you would have wanted. Walk them through your plan while you're still able to explain it clearly. These conversations don't have to be emotional—they can be practical and empowering.

## 4. MAKE A SIMPLE "IN CASE OF EMERGENCY GUIDE"

A one-page document with key contacts (your advisor, attorney and CPA), account locations, insurance information and digital logins can save your family from hours—or even days—of searching. Ask your advisor or access our In Case of Emergency form to get started.

## 5. REVIEW AND UPDATE YOUR BENEFICIARIES

Life changes—marriages, divorces, births and deaths—can all impact your wishes. Reviewing your designations regularly ensures your assets go where you intend them to go.

## 6. KEEP YOUR FINANCIAL HOUSE ORGANIZED

Consolidate stray accounts, close outdated ones and keep an updated inventory of your assets and liabilities. The more organized you are, the less guessing your family will have to do.

## 7. EDUCATE THE NEXT GENERATION

Even a little financial literacy can go a long way. Help your heirs understand basic principles and responsibilities so they feel more capable when the time comes.

## 8. BRING YOUR FAMILY INTO THE PLANNING PROCESS

You don't have to do this alone. A facilitated family meeting or planning session can help everyone hear the same information, understand your goals and walk away with clarity and unity.

# How American Trust Wealth Helps Families Prepare Together

At American Trust Wealth, we believe that true planning is done in partnership—not just with your advisor, but with your entire family. We offer guided family meetings to help you introduce your wishes and your plan in a supportive, structured way. We can facilitate legacy conversations that reflect your values, not just your financial assets.

We also collaborate with your attorney, CPA, trustees and executors to make sure every piece of your plan works together. Our team provides document reviews, education for younger generations and tools to help you stay organized—all with the goal of reducing confusion, limiting stress and strengthening your family's ability to move forward together.

## Let's Start the Conversation

At American Trust Wealth, we help families plan together—with clarity, confidence and peace of mind.

Whether you need help organizing your documents, hosting a family meeting or simply getting started, we're here to support you.

Ready to take the next step?

Let's schedule a time to talk about how we can help you and your family prepare—together. For more information call 866-934-5078 or email [wealthmanagement@americantrust.com](mailto:wealthmanagement@americantrust.com).



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