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**I'm new to the whole idea of estate planning. At a minimum, what do I need to have to protect my estate and ensure that my family is cared for?**

- **a will,**
  - **a living will,**
  - **a durable power of attorney.**
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You already have an estate plan, even if you have done nothing. The possible problems with your plan may be:

- Assets may not pass according to your wishes.
- The federal government and the state in which you live may get much of what you own.
- Your family and friends may suffer undue inconvenience.

To many people, estate planning is an unpleasant or morbid subject. It gets put off because they are "too busy," or because they think they don't own enough assets for planning to matter, or because they don't like to think about death.

Estate planning can raise some difficult emotional issues; but ignoring those issues now may cost your family thousands of dollars later. Your failure to consider these issues today may well as cause considerable anguish during a period of high stress and grief.

Proper estate planning takes far less time and effort than most people imagine, and it can give you tremendous peace of mind.

Estate planning includes a few simple components:

- how property is transferred after someone dies
- determination of what is owned so that informed choices can be made regarding disposition
- how to avoid paying unnecessary and often excessive taxes.

Regardless of your age or level of wealth, you should have certain estate related documents:

- a will,
- a living will,
- a durable power of attorney.