

Holidays go well with wills, trusts

Make family comfortable with discussions



Ted Muegenburg

By Ted Muegenburg

When families gather this holiday season, there might be unseen tension in the room. As a parent, you've had many "talks" with your children; some of them difficult. But there is one talk many parents and their grown children avoid; one that is essential to encouraging family harmony after you are gone.

Some people might think talking about wills and trusts will ruin Christmas and the festive atmosphere. In fact, the holidays are an ideal time to broach the subject because the emotional, familial aspects of a will and trust can meld perfectly with holiday traditions, as long as the subject is handled properly.

Our thinking on this issue has evolved from "don't tell much in case you change your mind" to transparency. Even though it may be uncomfortable now, having the talk leads to smoother transitions later. It may be difficult, but it is one of the best things you can do for your family because it defines expectations – who is in charge? Who gets what and how? When do they get it?

Because this often involves many family members, you may want to set aside time while most, if not all, of your family is gathered for Christmas or New Year's.

Start by talking about how you would like to be treated if you become unable to care for yourself. This not only includes end-of-life care, but also long-term care and dealing with Alzheimer's or dementia.

This is perhaps the hardest part of the conversation and your children will likely shy away from having it, but you should do it anyway. Include your care preferences, your financial preparations and who should act for you.

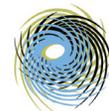
Next, talk about what you would like to have happen when you die. Are you leaving specific items to certain family members? Are you making gifts to charities or non-family members? However you have left things, it is best if your family hears it from you now, not your lawyer after you are gone.

Sometimes, having "the talk" while performing a day-to-day task together, like doing dishes, can make the topic less stressful. Meeting together with a neutral third party, like the family's lawyer, can also help take emotion out of the situation.

Finally, weaving family history and tradition into "the talk" can help make everyone feel more comfortable and can blend with the holiday spirit.

.....

Ted Muegenburg, an estate planning attorney at META law, inc. Ventura, has 30 years of experience educating clients about how to transfer their hard-earned assets to their family and community in ways consistent with their values, goals and aspirations.



META law, inc.

META law, inc.
1893 Knoll Drive, Ventura, CA 93003
(805) 856-3400