



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

CREATING AN ETHICAL WILL

An ethical will is a document that enables the writer to convey his or her values and wisdom with family and friends. It is helpful to reflect back on our lives and experiences—our successes, challenges, influences and wisdom gained. We may choose to do this at any turning point in our lives, such as middle age or when facing major changes. This reflection about our lives and loved ones is especially common when one is facing a serious illness. We often think about the memories we've shared, lessons we've learned and dreams that we hope for.

WHAT IS AN ETHICAL WILL?

An ethical will is an opportunity to say and leave a permanent record of your values, memories, beliefs, ideas and personal reflections to friends, family and important people in your life. It is a way to securely pass on those memories, special events, philosophies and sentimental thoughts that would be lost or forgotten without a physical reminder. This written document, video or audio tape is something that loved ones can hold on to once you are no longer able to communicate. Unlike a traditional will, an ethical will is not a legal document and does not discuss tangible things you own. It can be written at any point in one's life and rewritten as your values change.



HELPFUL HINTS FOR AN ETHICAL WILL

- Speak to your loved ones directly.
- Practice ahead of time what you will say before you write or say the final version.
- Carefully choose your words so that you do not harm your loved ones. Remember: when they read it, you will not be able to explain yourself.
- Feel free to update your ethical will as events and life experiences change.

WHAT SHOULD MY ETHICAL WILL INCLUDE?

The most important part of an ethical will is that it is spoken from the heart. This is what will give the most benefit to you in reviewing your life and to your loved ones when they experience your words and remember you, what was important to you and how you found meaning in life. A few well-thought-out sentences can be as meaningful as many pages of writing. If you are unable to write or find it too difficult, ethical wills can also be done with a video camera or tape recorder where your wishes and thoughts are spoken. It can vary in length and wording, and the amount of time it takes to create it may also vary from hours to years. The ethical will is a gift you may choose to give to your children, grandchildren, friends and loved ones. You can ask a close friend or a health care professional to help you, if needed.

(over)

POSSIBLE TOPICS

You do not have to choose to write about all or any of them. It is most important that your ethical will reflect what you cherish in life. It will be as unique as your fingerprint.

- What I Loved About Life
- How I See Your Future
- What I Will Miss About You
- Things I Am Most Proud Of
- Things I Would Like You to Continue
- Things I Would Like to Be Forgiven For
- Dreams That I Realized
- Values That Are Important to Me
- Mistakes I Have Made and Lessons I Have Learned
- My Happiest Moments
- My Funniest Stories
- Let Me Tell You About
- Ways That I Have Survived Difficult Times
- Who and What Has Influenced My Life
- Wishes for the Future



CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

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