

What are you waiting for?

COVID-19 pandemic has made more people think about just how crucial it is to make a Will

Understandably, the current coronavirus (COVID-19) situation is causing angst among people, particularly elderly and vulnerable clients who have been self-isolating. It's estimated that more than half of British adults have not made a Will.

The coronavirus pandemic has made more people think about just how crucial it is to make a Will and ensure it is kept up to date. Everyone should have a Will, but it is even more important if you have children; you own property or have savings, investments, insurance policies; or you own a business. Your Will lets you decide what happens to your money, property and possessions after your death.

MAKE SURE YOUR WISHES ARE CLEAR

Making a Will and keeping it up to date is the only way you can ensure that when you die, your wishes are clear. If you die with no valid Will in England or Wales, the law will decide who gets what. If you have no living family members, all your property and possessions will go to the Crown.

If you make a Will, you can also make sure you don't pay more Inheritance Tax than you legally need to. It's an essential part of your financial planning. Not only does it set out your wishes, but die without a Will, and your estate will generally be divided according to the rules of intestacy, which may not reflect your wishes. Without one, the state directs who inherits, so your loved ones, relatives, friends and favourite charities may get nothing.

COHABITANTS

It is particularly important to make a Will if you are not married or are not in a registered civil partnership (a legal arrangement that gives same-sex partners the same status as a married couple). This is because the law does not automatically recognise cohabitants (partners who live together) as having the same rights as husbands, wives and registered civil partners. As a result, even if you've lived together for many years, your cohabitant may be left with nothing if you have not made a Will.

A Will is also vital if you have children or dependents who may not be able to care for themselves. Without a Will, there could be uncertainty about who will look after or provide for them if you die.

PEACE OF MIND

No one likes to think about it, but death is the one certainty that we all face. Planning ahead can give you the peace of mind that your loved ones can cope financially without you, and at a difficult time it helps remove the stress that monetary worries can bring. Planning your finances in advance should help you to ensure that when you die, everything you own goes where you want it to. Making a Will is the first step in ensuring that your estate is shared out exactly as you want it to be.

If you leave everything to your spouse or registered civil partner, there'll be no Inheritance Tax to pay, because they are classed as an exempt beneficiary. Or you may decide to use your tax-free allowance to give some of your estate to someone else or to a family trust. Scottish law on inheritance differs from English law.

PASSING ON YOUR ESTATE

Executors are the people you name in your Will to carry out your wishes after you die. They will be responsible for all aspects of winding up your affairs after you've passed away, such as arranging your funeral, notifying people and organisations that you've died, collating information about your assets and liabilities, dealing with any tax bills, paying debts and distributing your estate to your chosen beneficiaries.

You can make all types of different gifts in your Will – these are called 'legacies'. For example, you may want to give an item of sentimental value to a particular person, or perhaps a fixed cash amount to a friend or favourite charity. You can

then decide who you would like to receive the rest of your estate and in what proportions. Once you've made your Will, it is important to keep it in a safe place and tell your executor, close friend or relative where it is. ■

REVIEW YOUR WILL

It is advisable to review your Will every five years and after any major change in your life, such as getting separated, married or divorced, having a child or moving house. Any change must be by Codicil (an addition, amendment or supplement to a Will) or by making a new Will. Please contact us to find out more.

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