

A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES & BENEFICIARIES

A Steady Path Forward

Your checklist for the days, weeks, and months after losing someone you love

When someone you love dies, the practical to-do list arrives at the very moment you have the least energy for it. This checklist is meant to lighten that load. It sorts the most common tasks by timing, so you can focus on what truly needs attention now and set the rest aside for later.

Not every item will apply to your family, and very few need to happen quickly. Check off what you can, hand off what you can, and lean on the people around you — including us.

Three things to remember

- 1. Slow is okay.** Outside of a few time-sensitive items, most financial decisions can wait weeks or months.
- 2. You don't have to do it alone.** Share tasks with family, friends, an attorney, a CPA, and your Hurlow advisor.
- 3. Ask before you sign, sell, or cash out.** Many inherited-asset decisions can't be undone. A quick call can save real money.

INSIDE

The first 24–48 hours	2
The first two weeks	2
Settling the estate	3
Who to notify	4
Before you decide anything: a beneficiary's guide	5
Your key contacts	6

STEP ONE

The first 24–48 hours

Focus only on what can't wait. Everything else will keep.

- ☐ **Obtain a legal pronouncement of death.** In a hospital, care facility, or with hospice, staff typically handle this. For an unexpected death at home, call 911.
- ☐ **Tell close family and friends.** Ask one or two trusted people to help spread the word to the wider circle.
- ☐ **Look for written wishes.** Check for a letter of instruction, prepaid funeral contract, or organ/body donation paperwork before making arrangements.
- ☐ **Choose a funeral home.** They can transport the body, help order death certificates, and walk you through options.
- ☐ **Arrange care for pets and dependents** who relied on your loved one day to day.
- ☐ **Secure the home and vehicles.** Lock doors, safeguard valuables and cash, and ask someone to watch the property during services.
- ☐ **Contact the employer,** if your loved one was working. Ask about final pay, life insurance, and any pension or survivor benefits.

STEP TWO

The first two weeks

- ☐ **Finalize funeral, burial, or cremation plans.** Compare prices, and ask about veteran, fraternal, or faith-community burial benefits if they apply.
- ☐ **Write and publish an obituary.** A gifted writer in the family can be a real help here. To reduce identity-theft risk, leave out birth date and home address.
- ☐ **Order certified death certificates** — generally 10 or more. Nearly every institution will ask for one. The funeral home or the county health department can provide them.
- ☐ **Locate the will and any trust documents.** Check home files, safes, and safe-deposit boxes, or ask the attorney who drafted them.
- ☐ **Confirm who the executor (personal representative) or successor trustee is.** That person leads most of the steps that follow.
- ☐ **Manage the mail.** Mail is one of the best maps of accounts, bills, and assets. USPS forwarding for a deceased person generally requires proof of legal authority, such as executor documentation.
- ☐ **Keep essential bills current** — mortgage, utilities, insurance — so the home stays protected while the estate is settled.

STEP THREE

Settling the estate

This phase can take months, sometimes longer. It's usually led by the executor or trustee, working with an attorney and CPA.

- ☐ **Meet with an estate attorney.** Even straightforward estates benefit from guidance on probate, creditor notices, and distributions.
- ☐ **Determine whether probate is needed.** Accounts with named beneficiaries, joint ownership, transfer-on-death designations, or trust ownership typically pass outside probate.
- ☐ **Build an inventory of assets and debts.** Include bank and investment accounts, retirement plans, real estate, vehicles, life insurance, business interests, valuables, and digital assets.
- ☐ **Hunt for anything missed.** Review recent tax returns, bank statements, email, and mail for accounts you may not know about. Check the Indiana unclaimed property database, too.
- ☐ **Consider appraisals** for real estate, jewelry, art, collectibles, or a business interest. Date-of-death values matter for taxes later.
- ☐ **Open an estate bank account** (once an EIN is obtained) to collect income and pay estate expenses separately.
- ☐ **Bring in a CPA.** A final personal income tax return is due for the year of death, and the estate or trust may need to file its own return.
- ☐ **Ask about the estate tax portability election** if there's a surviving spouse. Filing can preserve the unused federal exemption for the survivor, even when no tax is owed.
- ☐ **Keep a log** of every call, payment, and document sent. It protects the executor and makes the final accounting far easier.

An Indiana note

Indiana has no inheritance tax (it was repealed for deaths after 2012). For smaller estates, Indiana law may allow assets to be collected with a **small estate affidavit** rather than full probate, subject to a value limit and a waiting period after the date of death. An Indiana estate attorney can confirm whether your situation qualifies.

STEP FOUR

Who to notify

Most of these will ask for a certified death certificate. Keep a list of who you've contacted and when.

Government & identity

- ☐ **Social Security Administration** (1-800-772-1213). Funeral homes often report the death, but confirm it. Ask about survivor benefits and the one-time death payment for an eligible spouse or child.
- ☐ **Veterans Affairs**, if your loved one served, regarding burial and survivor benefits.
- ☐ **One credit bureau** (Equifax, Experian, or TransUnion) to flag the file as deceased. It will alert the other two.
- ☐ **Indiana BMV** to cancel the driver's license or ID, and the county voter registration office.
- ☐ **U.S. Department of State** if you want the passport cancelled (you may request it back as a keepsake).

Financial

- ☐ **Your Hurlow advisor** — we'll help coordinate with custodians and explain your options.
- ☐ **Banks and credit unions.** Joint accounts usually pass to the survivor; payable-on-death accounts go to the named beneficiary.
- ☐ **Brokerage, retirement plan, and annuity providers** to begin beneficiary claims.
- ☐ **Life insurance and long-term care insurers** to file claims or stop coverage.
- ☐ **Credit card issuers and lenders.** Close individual cards and note balances for the executor. Surviving joint holders can remove the deceased's name.
- ☐ **Pension administrators** and any former employers.

Household & digital

- ☐ **Home, auto, and health insurers** — update or cancel coverage, and ask about premium refunds. Keep homeowner's coverage in force while a home sits empty.
- ☐ **Phone, internet, streaming, subscriptions, and deliveries.**
- ☐ **Email and social media accounts** — close them or, where offered, memorialize them.
- ☐ **Loyalty and frequent-flier programs** — some points can be transferred to family.

FOR BENEFICIARIES

Before you decide anything

If you've been named a beneficiary, the choices you make now can shape taxes and outcomes for years. These are the questions we most want families to ask before acting.

- ☐ **Pause before cashing out an inherited IRA or 401(k).** A full withdrawal is often taxable all at once. Most non-spouse beneficiaries must empty inherited accounts within 10 years, and some must also take annual withdrawals along the way. There is often room to spread the tax bill thoughtfully.
- ☐ **Surviving spouses have extra options.** A spouse can often treat an inherited IRA as their own or keep it as an inherited account. The better choice depends on age and income needs.
- ☐ **Check whether a required distribution was missed** for the year of death. If your loved one hadn't taken it yet, the beneficiary may need to.
- ☐ **Ask about "step-up" in cost basis.** Many inherited taxable assets — stocks, funds, real estate — are reset to their value at death, which can dramatically reduce capital gains taxes on a sale.
- ☐ **Know that disclaiming is an option.** In some situations, declining an inheritance can pass it along more efficiently. Disclaimers generally must be made within nine months and before you accept any benefit.
- ☐ **Review your own plan.** An inheritance may change your beneficiary designations, estate documents, insurance needs, and retirement picture.
- ☐ **Be alert to scams.** Fraudsters watch obituaries. Verify any call or email about a loved one's "unpaid debt" or account before sharing information or money.
- ☐ **Hold off on big, irreversible moves** — selling a home, gifting large sums, or paying off debts in a rush — until you've had time to breathe and plan.

How Hurlow can help

As a fee-only fiduciary, our job is to act in your best interest. We can help you understand what you've inherited, coordinate with your attorney and CPA, and build a plan that honors your loved one and fits your life. There's no rush and no pressure — just reach out when you're ready.

Bloomington: (812) 333-4726 · **Indianapolis:** (317) 550-1833 · hurlowwealth.com

KEEP IT TOGETHER

Your key contacts

Jot down the people helping you, so everything is in one place.

Role	Name	Phone / Email
Hurlow advisor		
Executor / personal representative		
Successor trustee		
Estate attorney		
CPA / tax preparer		
Funeral home		
Life insurance agent		
Other family point person		
Other		

Documents to gather

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Certified death certificates | ☐ Deeds and vehicle titles |
| ☐ Will, trust, and any amendments | ☐ Marriage / divorce records |
| ☐ Recent tax returns (2–3 years) | ☐ Military discharge papers (DD-214) |
| ☐ Bank, brokerage & retirement statements | ☐ Pension & Social Security info |
| ☐ Life insurance policies | ☐ Recent bills and loan statements |

Services offered through Hurlow Wealth Management Group, Inc., a Registered Investment Adviser. Hurlow Wealth Management Group, Inc. does not provide tax, legal or accounting advice. Advisory services are only offered to clients or prospective clients where Hurlow Wealth Management Group, Inc. and its representatives are properly licensed or exempt from licensure. Past performance is no guarantee of future returns. Investing involves risk and possible loss of principal capital. No advice may be rendered by Hurlow Wealth Management Group, Inc. unless a client service agreement is in place.