

# When a Loved One Dies: A Checklist of Important Steps

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After a loved one passes away, there are numerous legal and financial matters to address. Here is a comprehensive checklist to help guide you through the process:

## **Obtain Certified Copies of the Death Certificate**

The funeral home will provide certified copies of the death certificate. The number needed will depend on the deceased's remaining assets.

## **Notify the Social Security Administration**

The funeral home typically contacts the Social Security Administration to report the death. The surviving spouse is entitled to a one-time death benefit of \$255 and may begin receiving the deceased spouse's higher monthly social security payment.

## **Life Insurance Claims**

Contact the life insurance company to report the death. They will send a claim form and request a certified copy of the death certificate. Once submitted, the death benefit proceeds will be issued to the beneficiaries. Retirement plans, such as IRAs and annuities, follow a similar process.

## **Pension and Benefits**

If the deceased was receiving a pension from the VA or a former employer, notify the institution. The surviving spouse may be eligible for a death benefit or monthly pension payments.

## **Real Estate**

If the deceased owned real estate in joint tenancy or in a trust, file a certified copy of the death certificate with the county register of deeds. For vacant homes, check with the real estate insurance company regarding coverage limits.

## **Vehicles**

For jointly owned vehicles, file a death certificate with the local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

## **Other Assets**

Handle remaining assets like bank accounts, CDs, stocks, and bonds similarly. Assets with Payable on Death (POD) or Transfer on Death (TOD) designations will require a death certificate provided to the respective financial institution. Any assets held by a trust typically avoid probate.

## **Probate Considerations**

Probate is required only for assets titled solely in the deceased's name without a surviving joint owner or beneficiary designation. In such cases, you will need to the Last Will and Testament with the probate court. If there is no Will, a probate estate will need to be opened, and Massachusetts law will dictate asset distribution.

Regardless of the asset amount or how they are titled, consulting a qualified probate attorney for guidance is always advisable after the loss of a loved one.

*The information contained in this article is not intended to make you an expert on estate planning nor is this article*

*intended to replace the need for the advice of a professional. Rather, this article is simply intended to provide a basic understanding of why estate planning is important for everybody and a basic understanding of some of the more common estate planning tools. This article does not constitute legal advice.*