

“Why Do I Need an Advance Directive Now?”

In my work, I have worked with many families who didn't think it was a priority to complete an Advance Directive (also known as a Living Will), which includes a durable power of attorney and indicates what kind of care you would want at the end of your life. I would not only encourage them to have their parents complete one, but also encourage them to complete one for themselves. Whereas a standard power of attorney can be put into effect at any time, whether it be short-term or long-term, general or specific, a durable power of attorney goes into effect when an individual is no longer able to care for him/herself. If a power of attorney or durable power of attorney have not been completed once an individual is no longer competent to make decisions, the only way decisions can be made on this individual's behalf is to have a court appoint a guardian.

Many individuals choose only to implement a durable power of attorney, trusting that this individual will make the necessary decisions on his/her behalf when the end of life comes for them. Others, however, find it reassuring to specify what kind of care they would like. This information can be included in an advance directive in many forms. The one I like most is called “The Five Wishes.” Created by the non-profit organization Aging with Dignity, the Five Wishes allows an individual to incorporate their thoughts, beliefs and hopes about what might happen when the end of life comes:

Wish 1: The Person I Want to Make Care Decisions for Me When I Can't

This section is an assignment of a health care agent (also called proxy, surrogate, representative or [health care power of attorney](#)). This person makes medical decisions on your behalf if you are unable to speak for yourself.

Wish 2: The Kind of Medical Treatment I Want or Don't Want

This section is a living will—a definition of what life support treatment means to you, and when you would and would not want it.

Wish 3: How Comfortable I Want to Be

This section addresses matters of comfort care—what type of pain management you would like, personal grooming and bathing instructions,

and whether you would like to know about options for [hospice](#) care, among others.

Wish 4: How I Want People to Treat Me

This section speaks to personal matters, such as whether you would like to be at home, whether you would like someone to pray at your bedside, among others.

Wish 5: What I Want My Loved Ones to Know

This section deals with matters of forgiveness, how you wish to be remembered and final wishes regarding [funeral](#) or memorial plans.

Whatever form it takes, completing an Advance Directive and informing your family and physician where they can find it, is an important task for everyone.