



Family Wealth
PLANNING INSTITUTE

How Do I Choose the Right Guardian for My Children?

Choosing a person or family to care for your children is difficult. In fact, for many families, it's the hardest part of planning their estate. It's not easy to think of anyone else, no matter how loving, raising your child. Yet, you can make a tremendous difference in your child's life by planning ahead. And you have nothing to lose except a few moments thinking about what you value most in life, and in childrearing.

You can ensure you have chosen the right guardian, by following three straight forward steps:

Step One: Make a List of People

Make the longest list you can stand of everyone you know who might possibly be a good guardian. When considering whether someone should be on the list, ask yourself, "would they provide a better home for my children than the foster care system?" If the answer is yes, include them.

Step Two: Decide What Matters Most

Choose a few factors that are most important to you and rank their order of priority. Here are some to consider:

- maturity and patience
- parenting style
- integrity and stability
- presence of children in the home already
- religion or spirituality
- relationship with your children
- marital or family status
- willingness to serve
- physical well-being
- social and moral habits and values
- availability of "free" time to raise children

Obviously, the perfect choice would score highly on every measure. But, because we are all imperfect, you will likely have more success in choosing the few characteristics that are most important to you. As you make your choice, consider that some factors can be influenced by you and others cannot. Integrity is something you cannot

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change. But if having an at-home parent is important to you, your prospective guardian might be willing to come home to raise your child if you make it possible through a well-structured and funded plan. Do not focus very much on financial resources as a factor – it is your responsibility as the parent to provide enough financial resources, either through insurance or savings, to provide for your children financially if you are not available.

Step Three: Match People to Priorities

Use the factors you chose in step two to narrow your list of candidates to a handful. Listen to your body and feelings as you consider each person or couple as guardian. You'll need to rank in order this short-list into the people you would want first, second, and so on. If you select an attorney experienced in helping parents of minor children, be prepared to answer the following question whenever you have named a couple: if the couple divorces or, because of death or incapacity, only one can serve, would you like either one to be guardian, or would you prefer to move to the next name on the list? Guardian nominations can be simple or as complex as you choose.

Regardless of which spouse's family or friends appear more frequently on your final list, it's important to keep both families involved. One way to do that is to name members of one family as guardians to care for the children, and members of the other family as trustees, to manage the assets for the children. If there is a likelihood of conflict between these family members, be sure to share this with your attorney so that your guardianship can be customized to encourage them to keep the lines of communication open.

Alexis Martin Neely is the nation's leading legal expert teaching parents about how to protect their children and their assets. Parents can learn more about choosing the right guardians plus how to avoid 1 of 6 common mistakes parents make when choosing guardians and even create free legal documents at www.KidsProtectionPlan.com. Find your own Personal Family Lawyer at www.PersonalFamilyLawyer.com. Get Alexis' humorous, enlightening, and often quite revealing Family Wealth Secrets by visiting her website at www.FamilyWealthMatters.com.

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