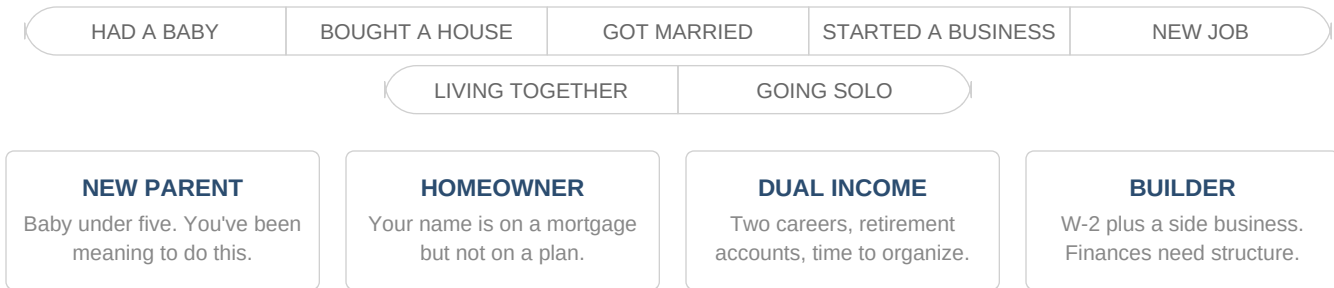


TUTORIAL LEVEL

Your First Plan

The Estate Planning Worksheet



Only 1 in 4 adults under 35 has a will.



GAME OVER: WHAT HAPPENS WITH NO PLAN

A judge picks who raises your kids. Your family may need a court order to access your accounts. Your 401(k) goes wherever the beneficiary form says, even if it's blank or outdated. Without a power of attorney, even paying your mortgage requires a judge's permission.



Scan to read the interactive version of this worksheet

About You

TUTORIAL

Every plan starts with the people it protects. That might be you and a partner, you and your kids, or just you and the life you're building.

Most couples finish this entire worksheet in about 45 minutes on the couch after the kids are asleep.

YOU

Full Legal Name

Date of Birth

Email

Phone

Home Address

Employer

Occupation

IF YOU HAVE A SPOUSE OR PARTNER**YOUR SPOUSE / PARTNER**

Full Legal Name

Date of Birth

Email

Phone

Employer

Occupation

Relationship (Married / Domestic Partner / Unmarried Partner / Engaged)

Date of Marriage (if applicable)

IF YOU HAVE CHILDREN

WHY THIS MATTERS

Your children's ages determine what protection they need. Minor children need a guardian. All children need to be named so nothing falls through the cracks.

CHILD 1

Full Name	Date of Birth	Relationship
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

CHILD 2

Full Name	Date of Birth	Relationship
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

CHILD 3

Full Name	Date of Birth	Relationship
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

No children? Skip to advisors below.

SIDE QUEST: YOUR ADVISORS (OPTIONAL)

Financial Advisor	Accountant / CPA
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Insurance Agent	Other
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

LEVEL 1 COMPLETE

Nice. Now we know who you are. Next up: the people you trust most.

The Guardian

COMPLETE IF YOU HAVE MINOR CHILDREN UNDER 18

TUTORIAL

If something happens to you, who raises your kids? If you don't name a guardian, a judge who has never met your family will make that decision. You don't need the perfect answer. You just need an answer that's better than leaving it to a stranger.

72% of parents say choosing a guardian is the hardest question in the process. You're not alone.

A NOTE ABOUT GUARDIANSHIP

Under Massachusetts law (M.G.L. c. 190B, Art. V), the court considers your nomination but ultimately decides based on the child's best interest. A written nomination in your will carries significant weight. Without one, the court starts from scratch.

CO-OP MODE

Fill this out together. The best time is a quiet evening after the kids are asleep. If you're a single parent, this matters even more. Name someone now so a judge doesn't have to.

GUARDIAN OF YOUR MINOR CHILDREN

The person(s) who would raise your children day to day if you are unable to.

First Choice (Full Name)

Relationship to You

City / State

Phone

ALTERNATE GUARDIAN

If your first choice is unable or unwilling to serve.

Full Name

Relationship

City / State

Phone

THE HARD PART

It's not that you don't understand this. It's that the worksheet asks you to imagine a world where you're not there. When you have a two-year-old, that thought is almost unbearable. But the discomfort fades in about five minutes, and what replaces it is relief.

Notes about your guardian choices (values, living situations, reasons, concerns)

LEVEL 2 COMPLETE

That was the hardest part. Everything from here is easier.

Backup Player

TUTORIAL

Planning isn't just about what happens if you die. It's about what happens if you're alive but can't make decisions: a car accident, a serious illness, a medical emergency.

Without these documents, even your closest family may need a court order to pay your bills or talk to your doctors.

63% of adults don't have a power of attorney. Your backup players step in immediately, no court required.

HEALTH CARE PROXY

Makes medical decisions for you if you can't communicate. Under MA law (M.G.L. c. 201D), can consent to or refuse treatment on your behalf.

Your Health Care Agent (Full Name)

Relationship

Alternate Agent (Full Name and Relationship)

DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY (FINANCES)

Manages your money, pays bills, handles finances if you're incapacitated.

Your Financial Agent (Full Name)

Relationship

Alternate Agent (Full Name and Relationship)

POWER UP: HOMESTEAD DECLARATION

If you own your home in Massachusetts, a declared homestead protects up to \$1,000,000 of equity from most creditors.

One-page filing at the Registry of Deeds. One of the fastest protections you can put in place.

HOMESTEAD STATUS

Do you own your home? (Yes / No / We rent)

Homestead Declaration filed? (Yes / No / Not sure)

How is your home titled? (Joint tenants / Tenants by entirety / My name only / In a trust / Not sure)

LEVEL 3 COMPLETE

Halfway there. The next part is just listing what you own.

The Inventory

TUTORIAL

Time to take stock. This isn't about net worth. It's about making sure every asset is accounted for so nothing gets lost, stuck in probate, or goes to the wrong person. Estimates are fine.

REAL ESTATE

PROPERTY ADDRESS	TITLE (JOINT/INDIVIDUAL)	EST. VALUE	MORTGAGE

RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS

ACCOUNT TYPE	INSTITUTION	BALANCE	CURRENT BENEFICIARY

WHY BENEFICIARIES MATTER

Beneficiary designations on retirement accounts and life insurance override your will. If your 401(k) form still lists an ex or is blank, the money goes wherever that form says. Most common and most fixable gap in any plan.

Beneficiary designation errors are the #1 gap in estate plans for people under 40.

LIFE INSURANCE

TYPE	COMPANY	DEATH BENEFIT	CURRENT BENEFICIARY

BANK & INVESTMENT ACCOUNTS

ACCOUNT TYPE	INSTITUTION	BALANCE	TITLE

DEBTS (OTHER THAN MORTGAGE)

TYPE	LENDER	BALANCE	WHOSE NAME

LEVEL 4 COMPLETE
One more level. Almost there.

The Save File

TUTORIAL

This is where you tell us how you want everything to work. We'll walk through options during your meeting. For now, just tell us what feels right. No wrong answers.

IF YOU HAVE MINOR CHILDREN

POWER UP: TRUST VS. OUTRIGHT

For families with minor children, assets almost always go into a trust. A trust lets you decide who manages the money, when children get access, and what it can be used for.

How would you like assets distributed for your children?

- Everything in trust until children reach a certain age**
Trustee manages funds for health, education, support. Balance distributed at an age you choose.
- Staggered distributions at multiple ages**
For example, one-third at 25, one-third at 30, the rest at 35.
- Trustee has full discretion**
Trustee decides when and how much based on each child's needs.
- Not sure yet**
We'll walk through options at your meeting.

If specific age(s), which?

TRUSTEE

Manages the money for your children until they're old enough. Can be the same as guardian or different.

First Choice (Full Name)

Relationship

Alternate (Full Name and Relationship)

IF YOU DO NOT HAVE MINOR CHILDREN

Primary Beneficiary / Distribution Wishes

Alternate Beneficiaries

PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE (EXECUTOR)

Handles probate: pays final bills, files taxes, distributes assets per your plan.

First Choice (Full Name)

Relationship

Alternate (Full Name and Relationship)

BONUS ROUND

Specific Gifts or Bequests

Anything Else We Should Know?

Your Plan at a Glance

A quick snapshot of what you told us. Review it before your meeting.

YOUR FAMILY

You

Partner

Child 1

Child 2

Child 3

KEY ASSETS

Home

Retirement

Life Insurance

Other

KEY PEOPLE

Guardian

Alt Guardian

HC Proxy

POA

Trustee

Executor

DISTRIBUTION

Approach

Age(s)

ACTION ITEMS

Homestead?

Beneficiaries?

Bring this page to your first meeting. It's the cheat sheet for the conversation.

Done.

You just did the thing you've been putting off.
Your plan starts here.

Bring this worksheet to your first meeting. We'll review everything together, answer your questions, and start building your plan. No surprises. No pressure.

PRESSTART

617.213.5003 | njameslaw.com



Scan to schedule
your first meeting

This worksheet is for general educational purposes only and does not constitute legal or tax advice. Nothing here creates an attorney-client relationship. Consult your own legal and tax advisors before taking action. Based on Massachusetts and current federal law; details vary by state.

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