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Helping clients prepare for family conversations about estate planning





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A guide for agents, financial professionals and centers of influence

Estate plans are built with documents. Legacies are carried out by people.

Use alongside the client workbook: "Your legacy, their future"

How this guide works with the client workbook

The companion client workbook, "Your legacy, their future: A family conversation about estate planning and wealth transfer," is designed for parents and adult children. It helps families reflect on values, prepare for meetings, clarify expectations and continue the conversation over time.

This guide is for financial professionals. Use it to help clients understand the value of family conversations, decide whether a family meeting makes sense, think through what they are comfortable sharing, prepare for emotional or practical questions, clarify roles and responsibilities, identify when to involve attorneys or tax professionals, and follow up after the conversation.



The client workbook helps families talk. This guide helps you prepare clients to talk well.

Use the workbook as a preparation tool, not as a script that must be followed word for word.

- Encourage clients to share only what they are comfortable sharing.
- Treat each family meeting as a beginning, not the final word.
- Reinforce that professional roles should remain clear throughout the process.

Why family conversations matter

Many clients believe that having a signed estate plan is enough. In many ways, it is the essential foundation. But documents alone may not prepare the family members who will one day live with, benefit from or help carry out the plan.

Without conversation, family members may be left to guess:

- Why certain decisions were made
- Whether everyone was treated fairly
- Who is expected to serve in important roles
- What information they are supposed to know
- How family property, business interests or sentimental assets should be handled
- Whether parents want privacy, transparency or something in between
- What to do first when the time comes

A thoughtful family conversation can help reduce surprises, clarify expectations and give clients an opportunity to explain the values behind their planning. It can also help beneficiaries understand that wealth transfer is not only about receiving assets. It may also involve stewardship, responsibility and family continuity.



A simple way to frame it with clients: "Your estate plan can explain what should happen. A family conversation can help explain why it matters."



The financial professional role

Your role is not to replace the attorney, tax professional or family decision-maker. Your role is to help clients prepare.

That may include asking good questions, providing the client workbook, helping clients think through their goals and concerns, and identifying when other professionals should be involved.

Your role	Areas to avoid
Help clients recognize the importance of communication	Interpret legal documents
Help clients consider whether a family meeting would be helpful	Give legal or tax advice
Help clients clarify what they want children or beneficiaries to understand	Pressure clients to disclose private information
Help clients think through how much detail they are comfortable sharing	Position the family meeting as a sales opportunity
Help identify decisions that may require explanation	Mediate family conflict beyond your role
Help clients consider how life insurance fits into broader legacy planning	Tell beneficiaries what they should expect to receive
Coordinate with the attorney, tax professional or broader estate planning team	Promise outcomes or assume family dynamics

A helpful mindset: Think of yourself as a guide at the edge of the conversation. The family conversation belongs to the family.

When to introduce the idea of a family meeting

Not every client needs the same conversation at the same time. Some families may be ready for a broad discussion about values and legacy. Others may only be ready to talk about roles and responsibilities. Some may need one-on-one conversations before any group meeting.

Natural planning triggers

- Creating or updating an estate plan
- Discussing wealth transfer strategies
- Planning for business succession
- Experiencing a major liquidity event
- Reviewing beneficiary designations
- Entering retirement or a new life stage
- Experiencing a significant health change
- Preparing adult children for stewardship of wealth

Signs a client may benefit from the workbook

- "I am not sure my kids understand what we are trying to do."
- "I do not want this to cause conflict after we are gone."
- "One child is better suited to manage things, but I worry how the others will feel."
- "We have never really talked about money as a family."
- "I want my children to be prepared, but I do not want to share everything."
- "Our estate plan is complicated."
- "We have a family business, and not everyone is involved."
- "I do not know how to explain why we made this decision."



A simple transition: "That may be a good reason to think about a family conversation — not necessarily to share every detail, but to help your family understand your intentions."



How to open the topic with clients

Estate planning can feel private. Family conversations can feel emotional. Clients may resist the idea at first because they assume a family meeting means revealing everything, inviting disagreement or giving up control.

Your goal is to lower the pressure.

Client situation	Possible language
Broad and gentle	"Many families have strong estate plans on paper, but the people who may one day help carry them out do not always understand the intentions behind them. Would it be helpful to talk about whether a family conversation makes sense for you?"
Roles and responsibilities	"You have named people in important roles. Have you had a chance to talk with them about what those responsibilities may involve?"
Fairness concerns	"Sometimes decisions that are thoughtful can still be misunderstood if the family only sees the outcome. Are there any parts of your plan you worry could be interpreted differently than you intend?"
Privacy-sensitive client	"A family conversation does not have to mean sharing every number or every document. It can simply be a way to explain your values, your intentions and what you want your family to understand."
Life insurance context	"Life insurance can play an important role in a broader estate or legacy strategy. In some cases, it may be helpful for family members to understand the purpose it is intended to serve, even if you do not share all the details."
Center-of-influence version	"In our work with families, we often see that the planning documents are only part of the story. The family also benefits from understanding the intentions, roles and expectations behind the plan."

Discovery questions to ask clients

Good questions help clients clarify what they already know, what they are unsure about and where they may need support from their professional team. These questions are designed to guide the client thinking without stepping into legal or tax advice.

Questions about purpose

- What do you most want your children or beneficiaries to understand about your plan?
- What values shaped your estate planning decisions?
- What do you hope this wealth transfer makes possible?
- What do you hope your family carries forward?
- What concerns you most about how your plan may be received?

Questions about communication

- Have you talked with your children or beneficiaries about your estate plan before?
- How much detail are you comfortable sharing?
- Are there topics you want to keep private for now?
- Would you prefer to start with a values-based conversation rather than a financial one?
- Would individual conversations feel more productive than a group meeting?
- Who should be included in the first conversation?

Questions about roles

- Have you told the people named in key roles?
- Do they understand what may be expected of them?
- Have they agreed to serve?
- Are there any roles that could cause tension among family members?
- Would a corporate trustee, professional fiduciary or other outside support be worth discussing with the attorney?
- Does the person named have the time, temperament and skills the role may require?

Questions about family dynamics

- Are there family members who may define fairness differently than you do?
- Are there prior gifts, loans or support that may affect perceptions?
- Are there blended family considerations?
- Are there business, farm, cabin or real estate issues that could create complexity?
- Are there family members who may struggle with the responsibilities of receiving wealth?
- Are there old family dynamics that could resurface during a meeting?

Questions about professional support

- What questions should your attorney address?
- What questions should your tax professional address?
- What questions would you like me to help you think through?
- Would it be helpful to coordinate with your broader estate planning team before you talk with your family?
- Would you want a professional present for part of the family conversation?



Helping clients decide what to share

One of the most important ways you can help clients is by separating communication from full disclosure. Clients may avoid family conversations because they assume they must reveal every account, asset and distribution decision. In many cases, the first conversation can be productive without that level of detail.

Level	Focus	What may be shared	Professional guidance point
1	Values and intentions	Values behind the plan, what clients hope to accomplish and what they want family members to understand	A useful starting point for clients who value privacy or have never discussed wealth openly
2	Roles and responsibilities	Who has been named in key roles and why	Helps prepare executors, trustees, powers of attorney, health care decision-makers or family points of contact
3	General structure	A broad overview of how the plan is designed, without exact amounts	Helps beneficiaries understand the general flow and reasoning behind certain choices
4	Specific details	More complete financial, legal or planning details	May be appropriate when the attorney, tax professional or other estate planning team members are involved

Client-facing language: "You do not have to share everything to have a meaningful conversation. The first meeting may simply help your family understand what matters most to you and what you hope they will carry forward."

Helping clients choose the right meeting format

There is no single right way to hold a family meeting. The best format depends on the client goals, family dynamics, privacy preferences and complexity of the plan.

Meeting format	When it may work best
One-on-one conversations	Family relationships are complex, one child has a unique role, a beneficiary may need extra preparation, privacy is important or the client wants to test the conversation before bringing everyone together.
Parents with adult children	The client wants shared understanding, the topic affects all children, the family communicates well together, or the first conversation will focus on values and broad expectations.
Parents, adult children, and spouses or partners	Spouses or partners will be affected by responsibilities, shared property, business interests or family caregiving may be involved, or the family already includes spouses or partners in major discussions.
Meeting with a financial professional or agent present	The client asks for support, the discussion includes financial strategy or insurance planning, the client wants help framing the purpose, or the meeting would benefit from a formal structure.
Meeting with attorney or tax professional present	Legal documents need explanation, tax considerations are central, the plan is complex, or fiduciary roles need to be explained.
A staged approach	The family would benefit from preparation, individual conversations, professional coordination, and one or more follow-up discussions.



Important boundary: Your attendance should be occasional, purposeful and by invitation. The family meeting belongs to the client and family.

A staged approach may look like this

1

Client meets with agent or financial professional to prepare.

2

Client meets with attorney or tax professional to clarify technical questions.

3

Parents hold a value-based conversation with adult children.

4

Named role-holders meet separately with parents and professionals.

5

Family schedules a follow-up conversation.

Preparing clients for emotional dynamics

Estate planning conversations may bring up strong feelings. That does not mean the conversation is going badly. It means the topic matters.

Clients may need help anticipating possible reactions before they meet with family members. You can help by asking thoughtful questions and encouraging preparation, without trying to predict or manage every emotional response.

Emotional dynamic	Question to ask the client
Surprise	What part of the conversation may be new information for your family?
Fairness concerns	Are there decisions that may require explanation because equal and fair may not look the same in your plan?
Role disappointment	Could anyone interpret a role decision as a statement about trust or closeness?
Privacy boundaries	What do you want your family to understand, and what do you prefer to keep private?
Old family patterns	Are there family dynamics that could make a group meeting more difficult?
Beneficiary readiness	Do you feel your beneficiaries are prepared for what they may one day receive or manage?



Helpful framing for clients: "You cannot control every reaction, but you can prepare for the conversation with care. You can be clear about your intentions, thoughtful about what you share and willing to listen."

Using the client workbook

The Family Conversations workbook can be introduced before, during or after planning discussions. It is especially useful when clients know they want to talk with family but do not know how to begin.



How to position it: "This workbook is designed to help you think through what you want your family to understand before you sit down together. You do not need to complete every section, and you do not need to share every answer."

Suggested ways to use it

Use case	Sections to emphasize
As preparation for the client	What does legacy mean to you? What do you hope your family understands? What might your family be wondering? Decide what you are comfortable sharing. Clarify roles before they become responsibilities.
As preparation for the client's beneficiaries	Reflect on your own expectations. Understand what this conversation is and is not. Questions beneficiaries may want to ask. Conversation starters for beneficiaries.
As a meeting guide	Set ground rules. Sample family meeting agenda. Conversation starters. Discussion notes.
As a follow-up tool	Reflect individually. Plan the next conversation. Questions for the estate planning team.

Crosswalk: Client workbook and professional support

Client workbook section	How the professional can support
What does legacy mean to you?	Help the client clarify values, legacy goals and planning priorities.
	Ask what the client wants beneficiaries to hear and remember.
	Help the client anticipate questions and concerns.
Creating a plan	Help the client distinguish values, roles, structure and specific details.
	Help the client identify decisions that may require context.
	Encourage discussion with named role-holders and referral to attorney when needed.
For beneficiaries: listening, learning and preparing	How the professional can support: If asked, help client's beneficiaries understand the process.
Planning the family meeting	Help the client consider format, timing and participants.
	Encourage structure without taking ownership of the meeting.
After the meeting	Follow up on planning gaps, insurance questions and next steps.

Staying in the right lane

Family conversations about estate planning can quickly move into legal, tax, financial, emotional and relational territory. Agents and financial professionals can provide valuable guidance, but they must be clear about their role.

Lane	Examples
The agent or financial professional lane	Why communication matters; how to prepare; values and intentions; whether life insurance supports broader legacy goals; coordination with the estate planning team; follow-up after the family meeting.
The attorney lane	Drafting or interpreting wills, trusts and other legal documents; fiduciary powers and responsibilities; probate questions; legal consequences of planning decisions; trust administration questions; legal disputes or beneficiary rights.
The tax professional lane	Estate, gift or generation-skipping transfer tax questions; income tax implications; charitable deduction questions; business tax planning; tax reporting; state-specific tax considerations.
The family lane	Personal values; relationship dynamics; decisions about what to share; emotional responses; private family history; the pace of the conversation; whether and how to continue the dialogue.

Red-flag moments

Pause and refer to the appropriate professional if a client or family member asks:

- Is this legally binding?
- Can this person challenge the will or trust?
- What are my rights as a beneficiary?
- What taxes will we owe?
- Should we change the trust?
- Can you explain what this legal language means?
- Is this distribution fair under the law?
- How do we remove a trustee?
- Can you tell my parents they should change this?
- Who is right in this family disagreement?



Helpful language: "That is an important question, and it deserves the right professional guidance. I can help you identify the issue and coordinate with your attorney or tax professional, but I do not want to give legal or tax advice."

When the financial professional is invited to attend

In some cases, clients may ask you to attend a family meeting. This should be occasional, intentional and clearly defined. Before accepting, clarify the purpose of your attendance.

Questions to ask before attending

- What do you want my role to be?
- What topics do you want me to address?
- Are there topics you do not want discussed?
- Will your attorney or tax professional also attend?
- Who will be in the room?
- Are there family dynamics I should be aware of?
- Do you want me to present information or simply be available for questions?
- How should we handle questions outside my role?
- What outcome would make the meeting successful?

Appropriate roles during a family meeting	Roles to avoid
Provide context around the purpose of life insurance	Take over the meeting
Explain broad financial planning concepts	Debate family members
Help frame the importance of preparation	Interpret legal documents
Answer questions within your professional role	Answer tax questions
Encourage clients to involve other professionals for legal or tax questions	Decide what clients should disclose
Help the family understand next steps	Advocate for one beneficiary over another or mediate unresolved family conflict



Opening statement if you attend: "I am here at your parents' invitation to provide support and answer questions within my role. This is their conversation, and they will decide what they are comfortable sharing."

Talk tracks for common client concerns

Client concern	Possible response
I do not want to tell my children how much money there is.	You do not have to share exact numbers to have a productive conversation. You may decide to focus first on values, intentions and roles.
I am afraid they will argue.	That is a real concern. The first step may be to prepare carefully, set ground rules and consider whether smaller conversations would work better than one large meeting.
My children define fairness differently than I do.	That is exactly why a conversation may help. You can explain what fairness means in your plan and what factors shaped your decisions.
One child is responsible; another is not.	That can be difficult to discuss. It may help to separate love from responsibility. Certain roles require time, temperament or experience. Your attorney can also help you think through role selection.
We have a family business.	Business succession can add complexity. A family conversation may help clarify expectations, but it is important to coordinate with your attorney, tax professional and business planning team.
I do not want this to feel like I am asking permission.	The conversation does not need to be a vote. You can make clear that the plan reflects your decisions, and the purpose of the meeting is to help the family understand your intentions.
I am worried they will ask questions I cannot answer.	You do not have to answer everything in the moment. It is appropriate to say that you want to discuss the question with your professional team before answering.
I do not know where to start.	Start with what matters most. Before discussing documents or details, talk about the values behind your plan and what you hope your family understands.

Questions centers of influence may ask

Question	Response
Why should an agent or financial professional be involved in this conversation?	Clients often look to trusted professionals for help preparing, organizing their thoughts, and understanding how estate planning, financial strategy and insurance planning work together. The agent does not replace the attorney or tax professional, but can help clients identify issues, ask better questions and coordinate next steps.
Will this create legal or tax advice concerns?	It should not, if roles are clear. The agent should focus on communication, preparation, financial strategy and insurance context, while referring legal and tax questions to the appropriate professionals.
Should the agent attend the family meeting?	Only when invited and when there is a clear purpose. Attendance should not be automatic. Many clients can use the workbook privately and hold the meeting themselves.
Could this help the estate planning process?	Yes. Family conversations may reveal questions about roles, liquidity, beneficiary readiness, asset titling, charitable intent, business succession or insurance planning. Those questions can then be addressed by the appropriate professionals.
What is the benefit to the client?	The client may gain greater confidence that family members understand their intentions, know where to turn for help and are better prepared for future responsibilities.

Follow-up after the family meeting

The first conversation is rarely the last. After the family meeting, reconnect with the client. The goal is not to ask for private family details, but to help identify whether additional planning, clarification or professional coordination may be needed.

Follow-up questions for clients

- How did the conversation go?
- What went better than expected?
- What felt difficult?
- Did any questions come up that your attorney or tax professional should address?
- Did the conversation reveal any confusion about roles or responsibilities?
- Did any family member seem surprised by your intentions?
- Are there planning decisions you want to revisit?
- Do beneficiary designations, ownership arrangements or insurance strategies need review?
- Would another family conversation be helpful?
- Is there anything you want to clarify before the next meeting?

Planning opportunities that may emerge

- Life insurance coverage
- Trust funding
- Business succession planning
- Long-term care planning
- Document location and access
- Beneficiary education
- Beneficiary designations
- Liquidity planning
- Charitable giving strategies
- Role selection
- Coordination among professionals
- Family governance or ongoing family meetings

Follow-up email template

Subject: Following up on your family conversation

Dear [Client name],

Thank you for sharing that you were preparing for a family conversation about your estate planning intentions. I hope the discussion was helpful and gave your family greater clarity about what matters most to you.

As a next step, it may be useful to review any questions that came up during the conversation and determine whether your attorney, tax professional or broader estate planning team should address them.

When we meet, we can also discuss whether anything from the conversation affects your financial strategy, insurance planning, beneficiary designations or future communication with your family.

Best,

[Name]

Quick reference: Do and do not

Do	Do not
Encourage thoughtful preparation	Give legal or tax advice
Ask open-ended questions	Interpret estate planning documents
Help clients clarify values and intentions	Pressure clients to disclose information
Normalize discomfort	Attend family meetings without a clear role
Reinforce that clients control what they share	Mediate family disputes or take sides among family members
Encourage involvement of the estate planning team	Make the meeting about products
Help identify questions for attorneys and tax professionals	Promise that communication will prevent conflict
Support follow-up after the meeting	Assume all families should have the same kind of meeting



Family meeting readiness checklist

Client readiness

- ☐ Identified why they want to have a family conversation
- ☐ Thought about what they want family members to understand
- ☐ Decided how much detail they are comfortable sharing
- ☐ Identified topics they prefer to keep private
- ☐ Considered who should attend
- ☐ Considered whether spouses or partners should be included
- ☐ Thought about possible emotional reactions
- ☐ Identified decisions that may need explanation
- ☐ Reviewed who has been named in key roles
- ☐ Considered whether named role-holders should be informed
- ☐ Consulted attorney or tax professional as needed
- ☐ Decided whether a professional should attend
- ☐ Planned a follow-up step

Financial professional readiness

- ☐ Clarified your role
- ☐ Identified what is within your scope
- ☐ Identified questions that belong to another professional
- ☐ Avoided interpreting legal documents
- ☐ Avoided giving tax advice
- ☐ Asked whether the client wants the workbook
- ☐ Encouraged coordination with the estate planning team
- ☐ Documented follow-up items as appropriate

Sample handoff language

Client handoff language

This workbook is designed to help you prepare for a family conversation about estate planning and wealth transfer. You do not need to complete every page or share every answer. Use it to think through what you want your family to understand, what you are comfortable discussing and what questions may be better addressed with your professional team. The goal is not to make every decision public. The goal is to help your family understand your intentions and be better prepared.

Center-of-influence handoff language

We are encouraging clients to think about the communication side of estate planning, particularly when adult children may one day serve in roles, receive assets or help carry out family wishes. The companion workbook is not intended to provide legal or tax advice. It is designed to help families prepare for thoughtful conversations about values, intentions, roles and expectations. We see it as a complement to the estate planning process, not a replacement for professional guidance.

Final perspective

A family meeting is not right for every client at every moment. But for many families, thoughtful communication can make a meaningful difference.

It can help parents explain the care behind their planning. It can help adult children understand future responsibilities. It can help reduce assumptions. It can help professional teams identify questions that need attention before they become urgent.

As a financial professional, you do not need to have every answer. You do not need to lead every meeting. You do not need to resolve every family concern.



Your value is in helping clients begin wisely. Because the most effective estate plans are not only well documented. They are also understood by the people who may one day carry them forward.

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