



The Critical First Week After Death: Your Essential Action Guide

Losing a loved one is overwhelming enough without having to navigate the complex responsibilities that follow. As someone who works with St. Louis families through probate challenges daily, I know that the first week after death can feel like a blur of decisions and obligations. While many tasks can wait, certain actions during this initial period are crucial for protecting your family's interests and honoring your loved one's legacy.

Let me walk you through what truly matters in those first seven days.

Start with the People Who Matter Most

Your first priority should be reaching out to your loved one's closest friends and family members. I understand this is emotionally difficult, but these notifications help ensure support systems are activated when you need them most. Don't feel pressured to contact everyone immediately – extended networks can be informed as you find the emotional bandwidth.

Handle Employment Matters Promptly

If your loved one was actively employed, their employer needs to know quickly, especially if they were expected at work. This simple step prevents unnecessary worry and confusion. For retirees or those with irregular work schedules, this notification can wait until you've addressed more pressing matters.

Secure and Protect the Estate's Assets

This is where many families unknowingly create problems for themselves. Well-meaning friends and relatives may want to "help" by taking items for safekeeping, but this can complicate probate proceedings later. Here's what I recommend:

Immediate Security Steps:

- Lock away valuable, portable items in a secure location
- Cancel newspaper subscriptions to prevent visible accumulation at an empty home
- Arrange for mail collection or forwarding – this helps identify assets and debts
- Maintain the property's appearance through regular yard care



- Arrange pet care and cancel household services like cleaning or meal deliveries
- Consider changing locks to prevent unauthorized access
- Post a "No Trespassing" sign inside the property and notify local police
- Install light timers to maintain the appearance of occupancy

These steps aren't just about security – they're about preserving the estate's value and preventing complications that could delay probate proceedings.

Funeral Arrangements: A Necessary Priority

As the personal representative, you'll typically handle funeral arrangements, though it's not legally required. This process naturally creates opportunities to inform additional friends and family members. Remember, the funeral director can be an valuable resource during this time.

Veterans Benefits: Act Quickly

If your loved one served in the military, contact the Veterans Administration immediately. They may contribute to funeral expenses, and your funeral director can facilitate this process. These benefits have specific timelines, so don't delay this step.

Death Certificates: Get More Than You Think You Need

You'll need official death certificates for virtually every financial institution, government agency, and legal proceeding. Order these through the funeral home when filing the original certificate. I always recommend getting around 10 copies at \$10-20 each – it's much easier than trying to obtain additional copies later.

The Will: Your Most Important Document

Finding the will is absolutely essential. If your loved one died with a valid will in place, they're considered to have died "testate." Here's where to look:

If you don't know where the will is:

- Contact the deceased's attorney – they may have a copy
- Search personal files and safe deposit boxes
- Check with the Court or Register of Wills (Missouri and Illinois allow will registration)
- Expand your search to previous residences
- Contact courts in locations where they previously lived



If no will is found, the deceased is considered to have died "intestate," which creates different legal procedures and distribution requirements.

Moving Forward with Confidence

These first-week tasks might seem overwhelming, but addressing them promptly protects your family's interests and ensures the probate process proceeds smoothly. Remember, you don't have to navigate this alone – specialized professionals understand these challenges and can provide the guidance you need.

As a Certified Probate Expert, I work closely with top probate attorneys throughout the St. Louis market. Whether you need real estate expertise, legal referrals, or simply someone who understands what you're going through, I'm here to help make the complex simple during these difficult times.

Need guidance navigating probate challenges? Contact me for a consultation or referral to experienced probate attorneys in your area.



Download eBook - The Essential Guide To Navigating The Probate Process And Settling An Estate



Schedule a Consultation

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