Guardianship and Alternatives

Who Will Make Decisions for Your Adult Child?

- At age 18, your child will gain the right to make his or her own decisions unless you take legal action. This includes the right to vote, marry, obtain a credit card, consent to medical treatments, make living arrangements, and sign contracts.

- Shifting rights to young adults who cannot make informed decisions or take responsibility for their choices carries many risks.

- You may need to take legal action to protect your child if he or she cannot:
  - Recognize when a decision needs to be made
  - Think about possible options
  - Understand the consequences of decisions
  - Express his or her needs

- Explore guardianship or another form of support to protect adults who cannot make decisions on their own.
  - **Guardianship** - This means that one person will have the legal power to make decisions for another person, mostly used when a person is unable to make his/her own decisions.

  - **Alternatives to Guardianship** - For some individuals with disabilities, less restrictive options to legal guardianship may provide the protections needed. Examples include a joint bank account to help with spending, Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare, Living Will, or Advance Medical Directive.

  - **Estate Planning** - This means looking ahead and deciding who will care for your youth, where he/she will live, and the financial needs he/she will have (includes writing wills and setting up special needs trusts).

(Turn over for Next Steps)
Next Steps

✓ Start exploring guardianship or alternatives around your child’s 17th birthday. The guardianship process takes time. Be ready to file the paperwork on your child’s 18th birthday.

✓ Read the Illinois Guardianship and Advocacy Commission’s “Guide to Adult Guardianship in Illinois” and “Guardianship Fact Sheet” online at [http://gac.state.il.us/osg](http://gac.state.il.us/osg). Or, you can call (866) 274-8023 and request to have copies mailed to you.

✓ For help, contact an attorney with experience in setting up special needs trusts or guardianship for young people with disabilities.
  - Check the Illinois Attorney General website to find free legal help: [http://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/about/probono.html](http://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/about/probono.html)

✓ Forms and petitions for guardianship are filed through each county’s Circuit Court Clerk. Visit [http://www.state.il.us/court/default.asp](http://www.state.il.us/court/default.asp) to find your Circuit Court Clerk’s contact information. Guardianship forms are often available on the Circuit Court’s website under the Probate Division.

✓ Talk to your child’s doctor about guardianship. You will need the doctor to fill out a medical report within 3 months prior to filing for guardianship. Remember to schedule the annual check up with this in mind.

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