

About Ethical Wills and Life Lessons

The term "Ethical Will" describes a legacy document. Its purpose is to share your values with surviving family members. It is not a legally enforceable document and is not used to convey property. It could, however, be the most important document you prepare if there are any concerns about passing on life lessons, preventing family disputes or caring for a disabled loved one after you're unable to communicate with others or after your death.

Examples of common themes addressed in an Ethical Will are:

- Important personal values and beliefs
- Important spiritual values
- Hopes and blessings for future generations
- Life's lessons
- Love
- Forgiving others and asking for forgiveness

There are many ways to prepare an Ethical Will. First, you can do it in writing using a form or guide. There are many useful books available through retailers like Amazon.com that will lead you through the process. Alternatively, you could write a letter to your children or loved ones. Examples of Ethical Wills you might look at for this format are available at <u>http://www.ethicalwill.com/examples.html</u>.

Another way to prepare an Ethical Will is to turn on a tape recorder or a video recorder and start talking. We advise you to share important thoughts. But this format could also make it easier to share family history, humorous stories and other sage advice that should be handed down.

If you use the recording format, we also advise you to talk about those things your survivors need to know after you're gone. In every family, duties and responsibilities are assigned. One spouse may take care of financial matters, while the other knows how to keep the home functioning properly. When a family member is lost, so is that specialized knowledge. You can use the recording to tell your surviving loved ones what they need to know to handle family matters when you can't handle them for yourself.

ETHICAL WILL

This format is designed to assist you in beginning the process of drafting your Ethical Will. It may be that some of the categories are not important to you. Skip those. It may be that there are other categories not included that are important to you. Include those. The idea is to let your loved ones know who you are, how you feel, what your values are, and how they are important to you. You might even include a section to individual people who are important to you explaining what they have meant to you.

1. OPENING

Dear (names of people to whom you want to give your Ethical Will):

2. MY EXPERIENCES

Write a series of short stories outlining important experiences in your lifetime and explain how they shaped your values and why they are important to current and future generations.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY AND OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

Explain why you value family more and more as you have grown older. Give specific examples of relationships with individual family members, such as grandparents, parents, or close friends.

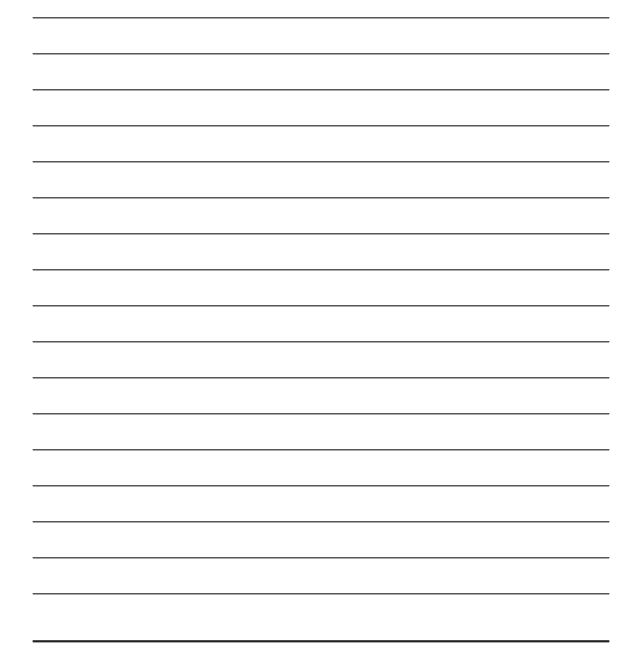


4. <u>RELIGION/SPIRITUALITY</u>

If you are a religious person, explain what your religion has meant to you and what you hope it means to your family and loved ones.

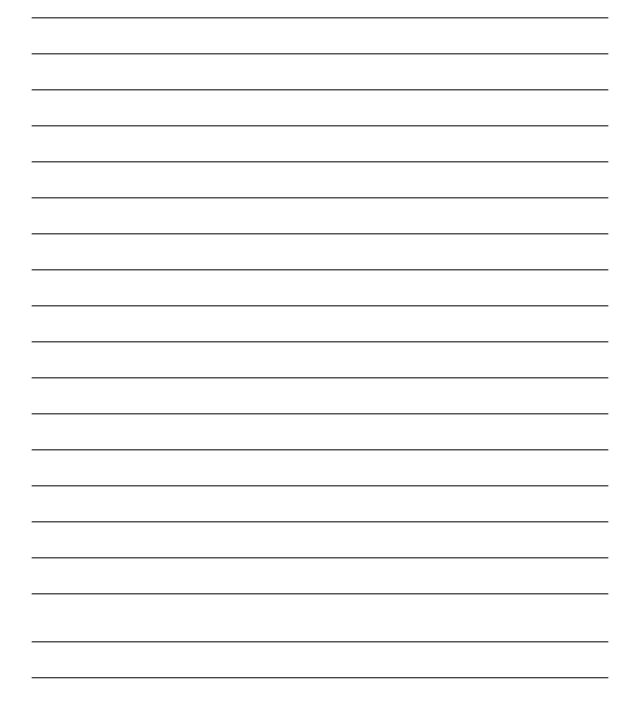
5. THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION/LEARNING/KNOWLEDGE

Describe the formal and informal education that you have received and the lessons that you have learned from that education and how it has affected you and how you hope it will affect your loved ones. Education comes from formal school and also from other sources; include both.



6. <u>RESPECT FOR LIFE</u>

Most of us respect life, not only our own but others. At our best we treat others as we would want to be treated. List some advice, including examples where possible, of how you have shown your respect for life and how your loved ones could do the same.



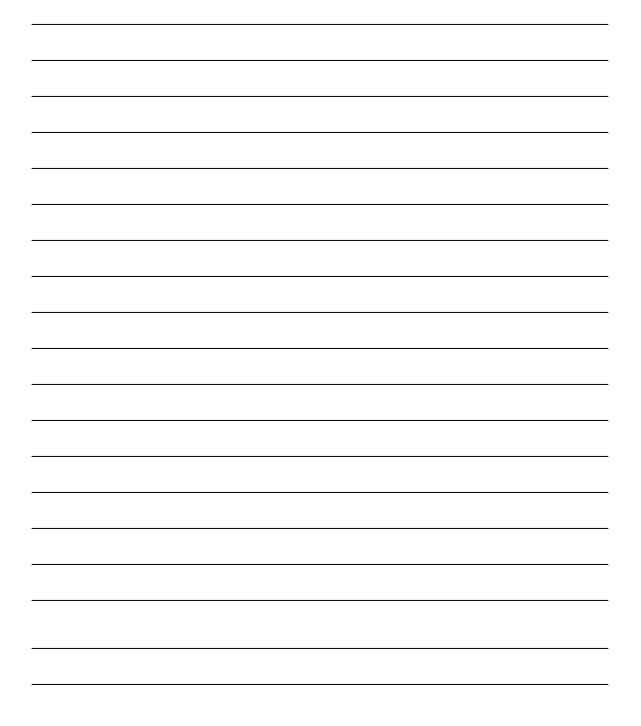
7. LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

We all make mistakes. If appropriate, express your regret for any injury to others that your mistakes may have caused, and especially write down what you learned from each of your mistakes.



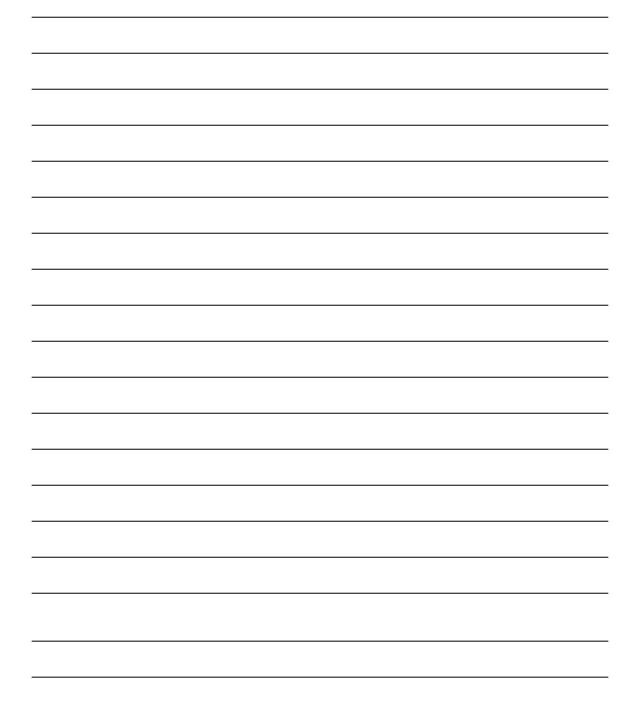
8. BE HONEST, TRUTHFUL, AND SINCERE

These qualities lead to a successful and satisfying life. Let your loved ones know how you like about these qualities, how you have been affected, and how you want them to be affected.



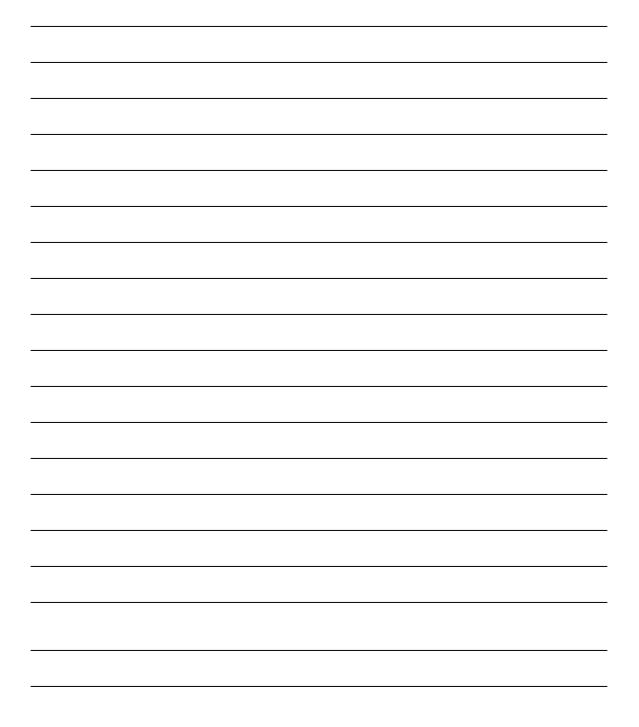
9. GIVING AND RECEIVING

While it gives us great joy to give, it gives others great joy to give to us. Let them know we appreciate their gifts. Explain your attitudes toward those who have given to you, what they have given, and what that has meant to you, as well as what you have given to others. Gifts are not limited to physical possessions. They include ideas, values and support.



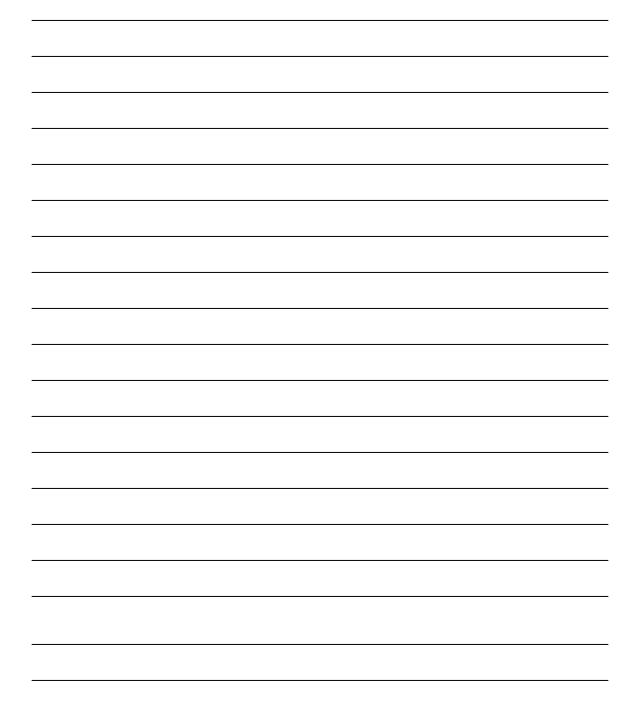
10. GOOD AND EVIL

Doing good and avoiding evil is important in all of our lives. Let your loved ones know how you feel about doing good and how you have tried to avoid evil.



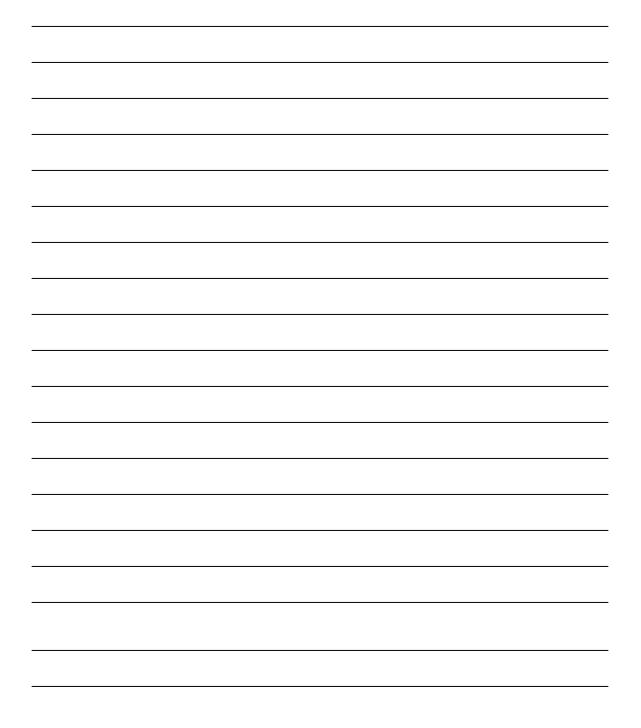
11. THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMOR

A good sense of humor is a blessing. It helps through difficult times. Let your loved ones know the value you see in humor.



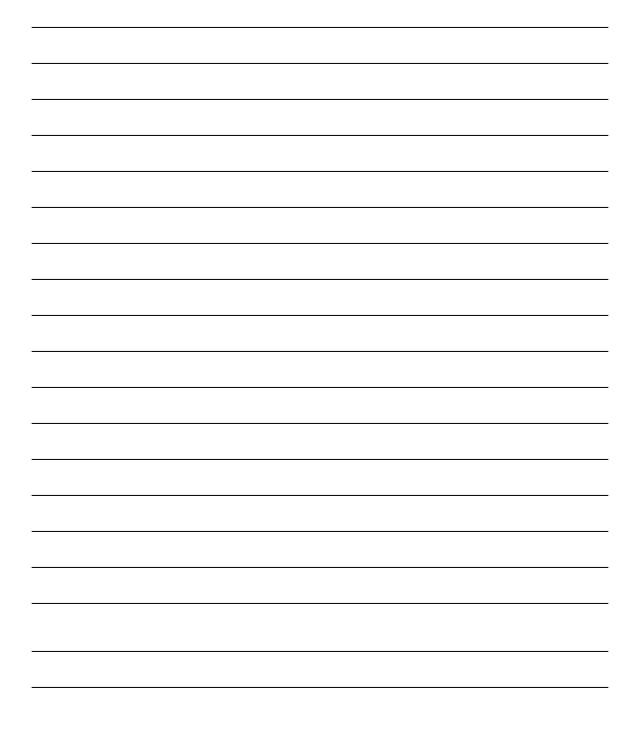
12. LESSONS OF LIFE

What are the most important lessons of life that you have learned? Tell stories where possible so that you can pass these lessons on to your loved ones.



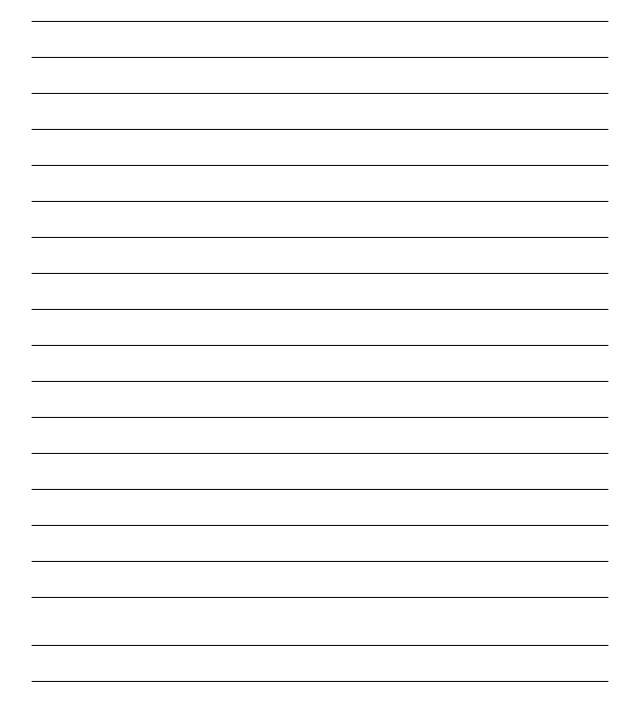
13. <u>REFLECTIONS</u>

Looking at your life up until this time, what are the important reflections? How do they affect you? How can you pass them on to others?



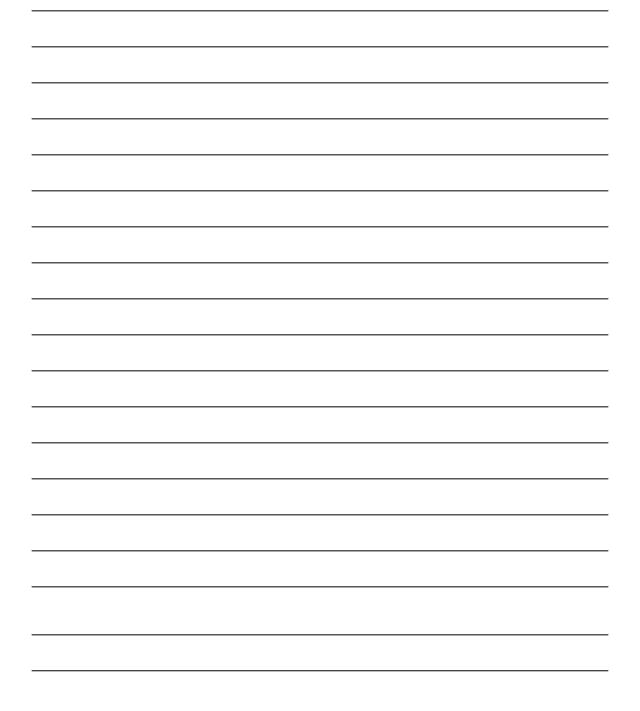
14. HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

What are your hopes for your own future, and more importantly, the future of your loved ones?



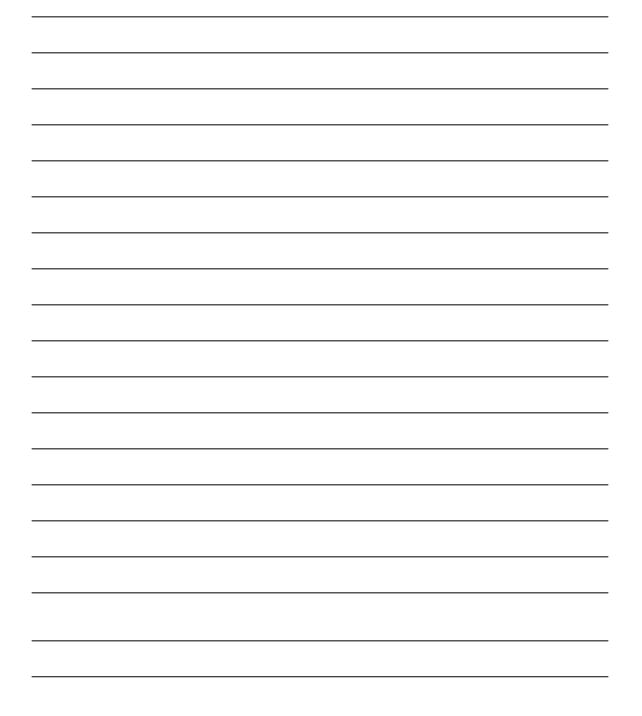
15. <u>LOVE</u>

Love is the strongest of the four basic human needs (to live, to love, to learn, to leave a legacy). What has love meant to you? Whose love has been particularly important? How would you advise others to think about love?



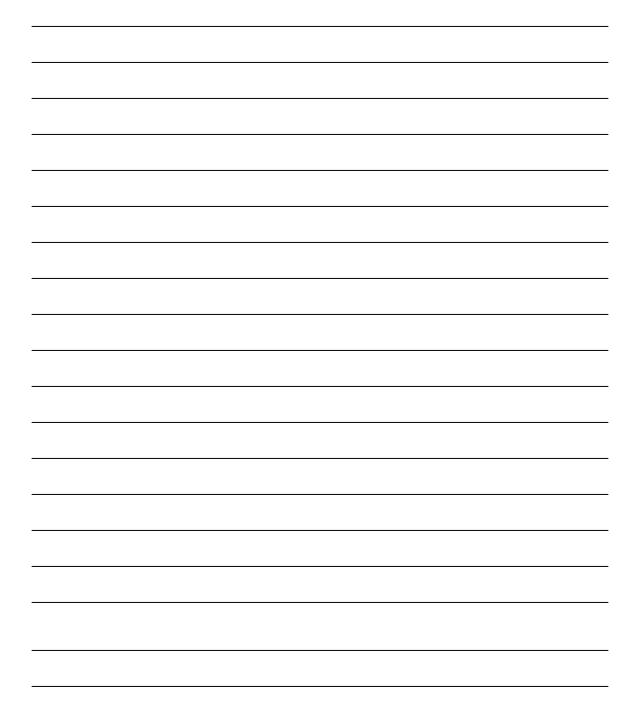
16. FORGIVENESS

None of us are perfect. We have all made mistakes. Our loved ones have made mistakes, too. Ask for forgiveness from those whom you have offended. Let those who have offended you know that they have been forgiven.



17. <u>REQUESTS</u>

What requests do you have to ask from others? Focus these requests on how they will help themselves, rather than how they will help you.



18. <u>CONCLUDING THOUGHTS</u>

What are your concluding thoughts? What would be your last good-bye to your loved ones?
