

Why Young Married Couples Need Estate Planning

By Michelle Chapin

A lot of young couples I speak with do not seem overly concerned about getting their estate plan in place. Most do not even think about it until they are pregnant with their first child. It seems as if they feel the documents are not relevant to them at this point in their lives when they are in the beginning stages of their careers.

Let's look at a married couple living in Maryland that has no children yet. If one spouse dies without a Will (known as dying *intestate*), the surviving spouse does not inherit the entire estate of the deceased spouse. Instead, under Maryland law, the surviving spouse would receive the first \$15,000 of the deceased spouse's estate plus one-half of the remaining amount. The deceased spouse's parents would receive the other one-half of the estate.

If this couple had lived in D.C., the surviving spouse would inherit 75% of the deceased spouse's estate while the deceased spouse's parents would receive the other 25%.

Every couple I spoke with was shocked at this outcome. They all expressed that they would prefer for the surviving spouse to inherit their entire estate. If the deceased spouse above died a resident of Virginia, Virginia's intestacy laws provide for the surviving spouse to inherit the entire estate.

Additionally, if a young couple filled out their beneficiary designations for their retirement plans before they were married, there is a good chance they did not update their beneficiary designations to name the spouse as the primary beneficiary once they were married. This means that their retirement plan assets will be distributed to the named beneficiary rather than the spouse.

Putting together an estate plan is more than just creating a Will for someone. It involves looking at all aspects of a client's financial picture and making sure that each piece of the financial puzzle is coordinated with the estate plan. Please let us know if we can help you set up an estate plan that is right for you.