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Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.

Caregiving and Legal Issues ¹

Rebecca McGovney and Mary Harrison²

When care for an elderly or sick relative begins, discussions on financial and legal topics can be uncomfortable for both the caregiver and their relative. As hard as this may be, UF researchers say talking about legal matters is important.

As a caregiver, you should know the location of your relative's important legal documents. This includes their birth certificate, Social Security card, insurance papers and property deeds. Are these kept at home or in a bank box? Where would your relative prefer them to be kept? If something should happen to your relative, will you have access to these items?

If your relative has a will, or other such documentation, find out where they keep it and who helped them to create it. You might want to meet with a lawyer to review what the will says and to make sure it is up to date. If your relative does not have a will, ask if they would like to create one and help them find a professional who can help them do so.

Also discuss with your relative who will have power of attorney to make legal and medical decisions if something were to happen to them. If they have made this decision, speak with their lawyer to review the paperwork.

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2. Rebecca McGovney, master's student, and Mary Harrison, professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611. Reviewed by Suzanna Smith, associate professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida, and Executive Producer, Family Album Radio.

Asking your relative these simple questions now can prevent potentially catastrophic problems down the road. These are too many sad stories of families caught off-guard and dealing with picking up the pieces at an already difficult time.

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