

What is an 'Emotional Will'?

An emotional will is about your legacy. It is a way to share your thoughts, values, lessons in life, passions, hopes and dreams with your children, friends and future generations. This is your chance to ensure that you don't leave this life with things left unsaid.

Because an emotional will is not a legal document you can be as creative as you'd like to be. You can "leave" memories, thoughts, well wishes, drawings, notebooks, photos, videos, sound recordings, it's really up to you how you do it.

We suggest you take time to complete an Emotional Will. It doesn't need to have a strict format or word limit and it is more likely to be a series of letters left for separate people than one large document. Give yourself time as you will likely revisit it and add things as time goes on. Firstly you might start by thinking about the important people in your life. Is there a memory or a moment that encapsulates a relationship? Is there something this relationship taught you? Are you grateful for an experience you shared? Write a letter directly to that person and place it in a separate envelope.

There are a number of ways to begin:

People

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Moments

What are key moments in your life where you have shown great courage, experienced great joy, intense sadness, overcome hardship, completed something you never thought possible or felt great happiness? These pivotal moments are often the signposts of our life, moments when life could have gone one way but it went another. An Emotional Will is an opportunity to share these memories with your loved ones. Often these moments are shared children, nieces and nephews.

Objects

Is there something in your will that you are gifting to a family member? This is another feature of the emotional will - you can share a memory or a story about the object, whether it's an heirloom or important for another reason, usually an object comes with memories and a legacy of its own. Describe this for the person you are gifting it to. Why did you choose this person to give it to? How did the object come to you? To the family? Are there important stories about your family "in" this object?

Memories

Often we have private memories or favourite stories about the people we love. These enduring memories often connect us throughout the years, even to old friends or to family members we only see occasionally. Share a story with an old friend about a cherished time you spent together. What did it mean to you to have them part of your life? You might feel the same about an old mentor or teacher. Write about and share these memories.

Food

The enjoyment and sharing of food is one of life's delights! Why not share your favourite recipe with a loved one. For example: "This is my favourite recipe that helped me through the tough times. It was Grandma's and she taught me how to cook it. I now pass this on to you and ask you to become the guardian of this much-treasured recipe", or "Here is a recipe that I used to make for a lazy Sunday. When you make it, think of me".

Songs/Books

The people who know you probably know what music you liked and books you enjoyed, but perhaps you may still surprise them? Why not put aside a copy of your top 10 books with a personal note written on the inside cover saying why you love this book? Or why not make a playlist of your favourite songs? One for driving? One for doing chores too?

Photos

Go through and label important photos with dates, places and the names of the people pictured. Note any memories or stories you wish to share. We often take for granted that our children or other family members will know the people and places in our photos, but perhaps they don't. Noting down ages is helpful too.

Where to keep your Emotional Will?

You could leave it with a folder of other important documents - such as your health insurance, funeral plans and digital/online passwords. There are many options now online for keeping documents with free storage, however many people want to keep hard copies. Our advice is to buy a small box or folder to store these important documents. Given the personal nature of the Emotional Will many people choose to give letters to people before they die.

Questions to get you started

- Who are the people you want to leave messages for in your emotional will?
- What is a message you'd like to leave for your partner/spouse/best friend/children?
- Describe a time in your life that you showed great courage
- Describe a time when you experienced joy
- Do you have any regrets? How have these shaped your life?
- What is your most memorable childhood experience?
- Who were your mentors and how did they help shape you?
- What were your parents like? How did this relationship shape you?
- What was your first paid job?
- What is your first memory?
- What was school like for you?
- Did you have a childhood sweetheart? Share a story about this.
- Describe a time of great sorrow or sadness. What impact did this have on you?
- What do you remember about your grandparents?
- Where is your most favourite place? Describe it as vividly as you can.