

Nothing can be more traumatic for young children than the sudden loss of both parents and, while it is unlikely that this will happen, it makes good sense to have a plan in place outlining who will take care of them. Great care and consideration should be given to the choice of guardians for your children. They will be responsible for the upbringing, education and care of your children until they are old enough to legally look after themselves. Whilst guardians do not necessarily have to have day-to-day care of your children (they are entitled to appoint others to do so), you will doubtless wish to appoint individuals who will be prepared to look after your children in the way you would yourself.

What will your children need?

- ❖ stability and continuity
- ❖ to be together
- ❖ to feel loved and safe after all the turmoil and upheaval.

Ideally your guardians will:

- ❖ love your children
- ❖ be able to cope physically, emotionally and financially with all of your children
- ❖ be able to maintain your children's other family and social relationships
- ❖ share your values.

Possible options:

- ❖ **Grandparents** - if grandparents are still relatively young and live near, then in most cases they will be the obvious choice. But if they live far away, this would mean the children having to change schools and make new friends, as well as cope with the loss of their parents. And, if you started your family later, or were yourself born to older parents, they may be physically unable to take on the burden of looking after young children again.
- ❖ **Siblings** – can often be a good choice, unless, of course, it would involve major upheaval or their lifestyle does not easily accommodate children.
- ❖ **Friends who live nearby** - if your family does not live near you, friends may know your children as well if not better than family members, and we tend to choose friends with similar values. Although not blood relatives, close friends may be in an ideal position to offer your children the love and continuity they need.

Multiple Guardians

You do not have to limit your choice to one guardian. You can have more than one, even if they do not live together. They would need to make all decision in relation to upbringing jointly, but you would need agree in advance, which guardian you would prefer your children to live with.

Substitute Guardian

It is possible to specify a preference for guardian with another person as substitute in case your preferred guardian becomes incapable of taking on the responsibility.

Discussing it with the person(s) you choose

The person or people you are naming as guardian(s) should be clear about what they are agreeing to do – ie taking over your responsibility until your children are 18 (although it is likely to be a moral responsibility that will continue for much longer). You will need to talk through all aspects of what you desire for your children in terms of accommodation, education and religion and make sure you discuss the financial implications as well.