

Special Needs Planning: First Steps

If you're like most parents who have a child with special needs, one of the most important questions you ask yourself is...

What's going to happen to my child when I'm no longer here?

To a large degree, the answer to that question will depend on the steps you begin taking today in order to arrange for your child's future well being.

In planning for your child with special needs, there are certain initial steps you should take, such as:

- 1. Assess your child's prognosis:** Will your child ever be able to earn a living...manage assets...live independently? Your evaluation of issues such as these will then guide you in the type of planning you need to complete in order to provide for your child. If you're unsure about your child's future prognosis, be conservative in your assumptions. You can always change your plans in the future.
- 2. Review your financial situation:** What assets do you have available to provide for your child's future financial needs? What can you do to accumulate additional assets for your child's care?
- 3. Living arrangements:** Where do you want your child to live after your death, or if you become physically unable to care for your child? Will your child need a guardian (or conservator)?
- 4. Government benefits:** Do you know what government benefits are available and what the requirements are to qualify for these benefits? Government benefits and their requirements can play a major role in your child's future well being. Be aware, however, that improper or careless planning could make your child ineligible for certain benefits. Government benefits fall into two groups:
 - **Entitlement Programs:** Eligibility for entitlement programs is based on meeting certain requirements, such as age, disability or blindness. An individual who, for example, meets the required definition of disability is entitled to receive benefits, regardless of that individual's financial situation.
 - **Needs-Based Programs:** In order to receive benefits from a needs-based program, a disabled individual cannot have income or assets above stated amounts.