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Things to Consider When Your Child Turns 18 (and before they go off to college)

As a parent you've spent 17 years 364 days taking care of and making decisions for your child. From your perspective that doesn't end when your child turns 18, but from a legal perspective it does - and quite dramatically. Whether you are aware of it or not, you can no longer make legal decisions for them or receive information about them that is considered private. This newsletter goes over issues you should be aware of and steps you should consider.

Checklist of Important Legal Documents

□ Healthcare Proxy

Medical records are protected by the federal privacy laws known as HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) and are therefore private - even from parents. Yes, you changed their diapers, put bands-aids on their skinned knees and now if you call the emergency room, the doctors won't talk to you and share information. By having a health care proxy in place, you have the ability get information and make medical decisions on behalf of your child.

□ HIPAA Authorization

While a health care proxy that contains the proper HIPAA language will give you access to your child's medical records, you may want to also have your student sign a HIPAA authorization that is specific to their college's student health center. Colleges may have specific rules and procedures that are tailored to their state's law; the document can give permission to disclose information related to substance abuse, mental health issues and other medical issues.

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□ Power of Attorney

While it's common to think of a power of attorney as just the ability to conduct financial matters for another (which it does) and usually we think of it in respect to an aging parent. But there are also important benefits of having one in place for your child. For example, if your son or daughter gets into a car accident, you can step in and have direct discussions with insurance companies. Or if they get in trouble with the law, the power of attorney gives you the ability to talk directly with the police on your child's behalf.

Insurance Matters

□ Health Insurance

While young adults can stay on their parent's health plan until age 26, a plan that works well locally may not provide adequate coverage away from home. Colleges offer health plans for their students, but they tend to have high deductibles so it's important to investigate the details beforehand to determine if your child is better off staying on your plan or not.

□ Protecting Valuables

Unlike when you went to college, chances are your child is bringing along lots of expensive electronics: laptop, smart phone, all the "i" devices in their lives, TV, jewelry and more. Dorm rooms are a shared space with lots of traffic. Take the precautions you can: etch or engrave a name and phone number on the device and enable tracking apps on the electronic devices - it may help in the recovery in case something gets stolen or misplaced. Document as much as you can by keeping receipts and taking pictures of the items.

Note: Contact the insurance carrier that you have your homeowners policy with and find out what's covered, what's not and whether additional coverage is warranted. At some point your child may move off-campus. Make sure the insurance company is aware of this - your policy may cover an on-campus incident but not when they are living independently.

□ Auto Insurance

Anyone who has added a new driver to their car insurance knows that their premium increases a lot (way more for teenage boys than girls.) If your child is not living at home when they go to college, contact your insurance carrier; they probably will reduce your premium while your child is away under the assumption that they won't have access to their car and will be driving a lot less. Most companies will give a "good student" discount (for B average or above) and a discount for taking a defensive driving course (it varies by state).

As with all aspects of one's life, it's best to make the effort to be proactive and get everything in place while you have the time. And by the way, congratulations on surviving 18 years as a parent - it goes fast!