

## Choosing Guardians for Children

Contributed by Jamie Kahn  
Sunday, 24 December 2006  
Last Updated Sunday, 24 December 2006

The most important decision you'll make in your estate plan is appointing guardians for your minor children. Who you pick will impact not only your children but also the lives of your guardians. While you and your children may feel an affinity for a particular adult(s), that relationship could be strained in a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week environment. Where should you begin in picking a guardian?

Unless you have a parent or relative who has expressed in past conversations a overwhelming desire to be your child's guardian, start listing family and friends with similar aged children. Potential guardians with older children may be looking forward to becoming empty-nesters and recent empty-nesters are likely enjoying their new freedom.

Consider the reversal of roles since many families reciprocate in being guardians - look at families whose children you would be willing to take custody. Have their children been raised with similar values that compliment yours? More to the point: do the parents of a potential family handle any given situation in a similar manner to you?

Let potential guardians know you are just starting to explore potential guardians. Take time to talk to several families, your children if they are old enough for such discussions and talk to your extended family about whom you are considering to be guardians. These discussions can generate other considerations and reveal overlooked potential guardians.

Many estate plans list primary and backup guardians. Your guardians are appointed in your Will. Some families opt to include a Revocable Living Trust in their estate plan to control distribution of assets to children until they reach an age or set criteria to ensure they are responsible to inherit money. Your guardians do not need to manage your estate's finances and it's sometimes wise to have your guardians separate from your revocable living trust's successor trustees.

The alternative to not appointing guardians quickly is allowing the state your live in to appoint guardians for your children - possibly someone who is not your first or second choice to act as such.

Written by Jamie Kahn, owner of [livingtrustarizona.com](http://livingtrustarizona.com) and writer for [living-trust-phoenix](http://living-trust-phoenix) and Estate Planning Phoenix