

Planning Ahead



Lisa C. Alexander, Esq.
Jakle & Alexander, LLP

Family Feud – Not Just a TV Game Show

We all remember the TV game show “Family Feud”. It was all in good fun. Not so the family feuds in real life following the death of a parent. Here are three of the most common reasons for a family to fight over a parent’s estate.

First are blended families, remarriage with children from prior marriages. Typical planning may involve providing for the surviving spouse, trusting that he or she will do right by the children of the predeceasing spouse. Intentions may start out well, but over time, relationships with step-children may become estranged leading to a revised estate plan benefitting only the children of the surviving spouse. With good advice, the remarried spouses can provide better protection for their respective children.

Second, the remarriage itself may be the issue, especially when the new family unit has trouble blending. Children often distrust the parent’s new spouse. The parent may be happy to have found new love and companionship, but the children feel threatened and resentful. It is critical for the parents to carefully plan for protection of their new spouse, and also their children. Open communication and good planning can go a long way to creating and preserving family harmony.

Third, is the conflict between one child who has taken on the caregiver role for a parent and another child unable to provide the same level of attention due to distance or work and family commitments. The more involved child may be added to bank accounts for convenience that later turns into a belief of greater entitlement as compensation for the caregiving. The more distant child perceives favoritism and suspects undue influence. Again, open communication and good planning may prevent ruptured relationships between siblings.

Estate Planning is not just about “who gets what,” it is about thoughtful and careful planning to preserve family harmony, the greatest legacy of all.

Lisa C. Alexander is an attorney at Jakle & Alexander, LLP. She can be reached by calling 310-656-4310 or by emailing her at alexander@jaklelaw.com.