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August 2026 Elder Law News

Top Stories

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

Q: A client from Downers Grove stated that when it comes time to assist and plan for my aging parents how can we minimize sibling disputes.

A: I gave the client my 10 Rules as stated below.

10 Rules to Prevent Sibling Conflicts When Dealing with Aging Parents

1. Have Family Meetings Early
Many families put off hard conversations until everyone is already under stress. It is usually better to talk while your parent can still take part in the discussion and explain what matters most to them.

2. Put Legal Documents in Place
A solid estate plan does more than divide property. It gives the family a playbook for decisions about money, medical care, and who has authority to act if your parent cannot speak for themselves.

Key documents usually include powers of attorney, health-care directives, a will or trust, and clear beneficiary designations. Review them periodically so they still match the parent's wishes and current family circumstances.

3. Clearly Define Roles
Conflict often starts when everyone assumes someone else is handling the details. Decide who will manage medical appointments, daily care, bills, paperwork, transportation, and communication with the rest of the family.

4. Focus on the Parent's Wishes
When disagreements come up, it helps to bring the conversation back to one question: "What would Mom or Dad want?" That question does not solve everything, but it can keep the focus on the parent instead of old sibling tensions.

5. Maintain Financial Transparency
Money is often where suspicion starts. Keep records, share updates, and make sure the person paying bills or managing accounts is not left to explain everything only after a problem arises.

6. Consider Professional Help
A neutral professional can make difficult conversations easier. An elder-law attorney, mediator, care manager, financial advisor, or counselor may help the family separate legal issues from emotional ones.

7. Recognize Caregiver Burnout
The person doing the most hands-on work may become tired, frustrated, or isolated, even when they truly want to help. Build in breaks, backup coverage, and honest check-ins before resentment becomes the main topic.

8. Create a Care Plan in Writing
A written care plan does not need to be complicated. It should list the parent's needs, who is responsible for each task, how expenses will be handled, and when the family will revisit the plan.

9. Discuss Inheritance Separately from Caregiving
Caregiving decisions and inheritance decisions should not be treated as the same conversation. A child who provides more care may need reimbursement or support, but that should be discussed openly rather than becoming an unspoken source of conflict later.

10. Accept That Fair Doesn't Always Mean Equal
Fairness does not always mean every person contributes the same amount of time or money. It means the plan is realistic, transparent, and respectful of each person's situation.

A Simple Rule

Families usually avoid the worst conflicts when they do three simple things consistently:

1. Talk before a crisis forces the issue.

2. Put decisions and responsibilities in writing.

3. Keep financial information clear and available to the right people.

In estate planning and elder care, those habits can prevent many of the arguments that surface when a parent's health starts to decline. The goal is not to make every family conversation easy. The goal is to make sure the family has fewer surprises, clearer expectations, and a plan everyone can understand.

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