

By Jim Miller

Special to the Forum

Divvying up personal possessions among adult children or other loved ones is a task that many parents dread. Deciding who should get what without showing favoritism, hurting someone's feeling or causing a feud can be difficult, even for close-knit families who enter the process with the best of intentions.

Here are some tips to consider that can help you divide your stuff with minimal conflict.

Problem Areas

For starters, you need to be aware that it's usually the small, simple items of little monetary value that cause the most conflicts. This is because the value we attach to the small personal possessions is usually sentimental or emotional, and because the simple items are the things that most families fail to talk about.

Family battles can also escalate over whether things are being divided fairly by monetary value. So for items of higher value like your jewelry, antiques and art, consider getting an appraisal to assure fair distribution. To locate an appraiser, visit appraisers.org.

Ways to Divvy

The best solution for passing along your personal possessions is for you to go through your house with your kids (or other heirs) either separately or all at once.

Open up cabinets, drawers and closets, and go through boxes in the attic to find out which items they would like to inherit and why.

They may have some emotional attachment to something you're not aware of. If more than one child wants the same thing, you will have the ultimate say.

Then you need to sit down and make a list of who gets what on paper, signed, dated and referenced in your will. You can revise it anytime you want. You may also want to consider writing an additional letter or create an audio tape, CD or DVD that further explains your intentions.

You can also specify a strategy for divvying up the rest of your property. Some fair and reasonable options include:

- Take turns choosing: Use a round-robin process where family members take turns picking out items they would like to have. If who goes first becomes an issue, they can always flip a coin or draw straws. Also, to help simplify things, break down the dividing process room-by-room, versus tackling the entire house.

- Have a family auction: Give each person involved the same amount of “play money,” or use “virtual points” to bid on the items they want. This can also be done online at eDivvyup.com, a website for families and estate executors that provides a fair and easy way to distribute of personal property.

For more ideas, see “Who Gets Grandma’s Yellow Pie Plate?” A resource created by the University of Minnesota Extension Service that offers a detailed workbook or interactive CD for

\$12.50, and DVD for \$30, that gives pointers to help families discuss property distribution and lists important factors to keep in mind that can help avoid conflict. You can order a copy online at yellowpieplate.umn.edu or by calling 800-876-8636.

It's also very important that you discuss your plans in advance with your kids so they can know ahead what to expect. Or, you may even want to start distributing some of your items now, while you can still alive.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of "The Savvy Senior" book.