

# Financial Planning

## Upfront: 5 Questions

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Mark Duffey is co-founder and president of Everest, a funeral planning concierge service in Houston. He spoke to Financial Planning about what advisors and their clients should know about death planning.

### When and how should advisors bring up death planning with their clients?

It seems so rude.

Death planning is really an estate-planning question, so when you first meet a client it makes sense to ask questions like: “What would happen to your estate if you were hit by a banana truck tomorrow? What about your spouse and kids? One of my jobs as a financial planner is to ask these kinds of questions.”

With existing clients, a great thing to say is, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, one of my jobs is to bring you cutting-edge ideas. You might want to look at death-planning strategies that can save your loved ones a lot of hassle, and save your estate some money.”

### Why does your company think it can offer valuable services in funeral planning of all things?

We are a consumer advocacy company, so we don't actually sell anything. For a flat fee, we go to market for clients, price out their plan and negotiate with different service providers. Only 2% to 3% of consumers shop around to compare prices. That's how they end up on a speeding train to overspending.

### Do you frequently get a cranky response when you call funeral homes negotiating for clients?

Oh, yeah. They are not used to it at all. Funeral homes receive calls about prices every day but, generally, the calls come from unwitting consumers. So the funeral home typically says, “The pricing is very complicated. We have several packages, so why don't you come on in and we'll show them to you?” But the packages are hyper-inflated and include lots of extra services.

The Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule requires that funeral homes provide an a la carte list of all the services they offer. But the lists are confusing, because there's no standard form.

### What's a good example of an inflated cost?

Embalming is a great example. It takes an hour to embalm a body, and fees can range from \$400 to \$1,400. These kinds of prices can tell you what kind of profit margin a funeral home is charging.

### Do you ever help clients pre-negotiate and plan their funeral and burial plan?

Absolutely, but we don't do it with the actual funeral home. We're all about pre-planning and pre-financing, but we don't recommend pre-buying, and neither does the AARP. If you lock in your business with a specific funeral home, and then you move, you're stuck with them.

**[www.everestfuneral.com](http://www.everestfuneral.com)**

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