12-Step Addiction Program for Death Denial:

A Prelude to End-of-Life Advance Planning

1

Acknowledge the consequences of your persistent resistance toward contemplating end-of-life management. Why is the subject of death a "can of worms" for you? Write down the hindering effects of evasion. Imagine possible scenarios whereby your family would likely be burdened by lack of premonitory input from you. Seeing the printed list will help solidify your resolve to overcome your posture of avoidance.

Examples: Emotional toll on self, including anxiety, fear, insecurity, vulnerability;
Absence of valuable family interaction to bring matters of mortality – the elephant in the room – out of the closet and into a comfort zone;
Future family stress, such as annoyances, confusion, conflicts, etc. at time of death that could be avoided by having access to pre-planned arrangements or stated preferences;
Financial risks of random actions at time of need.

2

Write down a quitting commitment… to quit ignoring the issue of inevitable death.
A list of reasons to transition from avoidance to acceptance and proactivity will help you stay engaged in meeting preparedness objectives.

Examples: You want to make it easier for your family in the future;
You want to use this focus as a way to feel close to your family now;
You want family to realize the ramifications of your life ending and maximize time spent with you while alive;
You want to have control over what happens to your assets;
You want to have a say in the way proceedings are managed;
You want your money spent wisely on funeral expenses so residual funds will be available for other purposes or doled out to family members.

3

Determine parameters for beginning your contemplation project. Set a date to begin a process of pre-planning - not far in the future because you might lose your resolve. Consider picking a date that's meaningful to you - your birthday, date a loved one died, a child's special day, a special milestone coming up, etc. Mark the day on a calendar and announce it to people close to you. Build it up among companions so you're less likely to back down when that day arrives. Seek support from others, encouraging them (even young people) to develop their own plans.

4

Choose an approach for your end-of-life planning venture, including access of resources for learning and methods for recording choices: Written records, online, computer notes, group projects, home parties, etc.

5

Optimize personal comfort. Do this in an environment that's conducive to exploration and decision making. Embellish the experience with a cup of tea, candles, quiet music, etc. During the process, take breaks to refresh your mind and energize your spirits through exercise, social interactions, snacks, etc.

6

Research the possibilities for end-of-life arrangements. You are apt to be surprised by the vast array of options and the extent to which you can become absorbed in this type of enjoyable event planning. Tap online resources, books, groups, etc. for information.

7

Determine a time frame, using a calendar specifically pegged for this endeavor. Establish dates that can serve as navigational guidelines for completing specific tasks, even small ones. Targeted decisions can follow your acquisition of knowledge as you progressively glean information about one topic after another according to your time line.

For example, by certain dates, you will want to have made specific decisions:
June 8th…method of preferred disposition
June 21st… preferred cemetery or other site
July 9… preferred sorts of providers
July 28… preferred types of products
August 14… preferred type/s of commemorative affairs
August 31… collection of biographical details and photos
September 16… preemptive measures for family assistance
Etcetera (depending on degree of involvement desired)

Once there's a foundation of preferences, it will be easier (and possibly even fun) to explore other avenues beyond the basic routes. On the other hand, you may decide to stop at a certain point along the continuum of options upon feeling content with the extent of decisions already made.

8

Resist the urge to give up. At first, it may be difficult to focus because you want to think about something less intimidating. Don't listen to voices telling you to go do something else. The view at the top of the mountain you're climbing will be worth the initial discomfort and effort.

Send distracting rationalizations to a different room in your head:

Examples: This is too depressing to contemplate… it's bound to bring on a bad mood… why bother doing this at all… my family can take care of this when it's time… there's no reason to care what's done because I'll be oblivious… maybe I should revisit this task later instead of now…

Go back to the list of reasons for planning ahead to remind yourself why you are doing this. Don't let a relapse be an end to your project. People sometimes slip back to an ingrained attitude that prompts attitudinal paralysis; but you can pick yourself up and continue the project while determining how to avert failure to succeed if temptation rears its ugly head yet again.

9

Celebrate your accomplishments. When you meet a goal, even if it is just laying the foundation for further decisions, do something to reward yourself.

10

Communicate with significant others in some manner – written or spoken – to let them know that your preferences have been determined. Inform them of locations where details are stored, including tangible items like CDs, literature, letters, etc. that you'd like included in your end-of-life proceedings.

11

Stay abreast of new developments in the realm of funeral planning, with an open mind that will enable you to consider alternatives. Review your preferences periodically in case you want to make changes. Always let your close companions know about them.

12

Relish the realization of your efforts. Focus on living life to the fullest, feeling confident in the sense of emotional security you've provided for your family. Enlivened and refreshed, you can take a deep breath. You are prepared!