Estate Tax Planning Checklist

Action Checklist — ClearLegalTips.com (2026)

Know your exposure and reduce it where possible.

Measure

- [ ] Totaled your gross estate in the worksheet (include life insurance you own and retirement accounts in full)
- [ ] Subtracted debts, mortgages, and deductions
- [ ] Compared the net to the $15M federal exemption AND your state's threshold
- [ ] Checked whether your state has an inheritance tax on your heirs Plan (if near a threshold)
- [ ] Reviewed annual gifting options ($19,000 per recipient in 2026)
- [ ] Asked about an irrevocable life insurance trust (ILIT) or other irrevocable trust
- [ ] Confirmed beneficiary designations on accounts and policies
- [ ] Checked whether portability applies (surviving spouse must file a return to elect it)
- [ ] Reviewed out-of-state real estate that could be taxed where it sits
- [ ] Met with an estate-planning attorney or tax professional

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

Work top to bottom: measure your exposure first, then plan only if you're near a federal or state threshold. Remember that only the amount above the exemption is taxed, that a revocable living trust avoids probate but does NOT reduce estate tax, and that portability is not automatic. This checklist is general information, not legal advice — confirm current figures and your state's rules with a licensed professional.