

Some of the “Rules of 18”

In Wisconsin, when a person reaches his or her 18th birthday, he or she becomes a legal adult. Unless a guardian has been appointed through a judge in a court of law, all of the rights and responsibilities that are part of being a legal adult go into effect.

At age 18 you have certain legal rights, such as the right to:

- Vote
- Get married
- Make a will
- Make a contract (such as renting an apartment, buying a car, taking out a loan, ...)
- Give or refuse consent for medical treatment
- Make independent decisions free from parental control
- Apply for credit (including credit cards)

Remember, in Wisconsin drinking beer, wine or other alcohol is not legal until age 21.

At age 18 you also have certain legal responsibilities, such as:

- Being tried in an adult criminal court if you break the law
- Self support (parents are not required to support their adult children)
- Serving on Jury duty if called to do so
- Being liable for all contracts entered into (such as making loan payments)
- Every male citizen and alien living in the United States must register with the military within 30 days of his 18th birthday. Even a male with severe disabilities who could not possibly serve in the military must register. Not registering is a federal crime. This does not mean you are joining the military. There is no military draft right now where males of certain ages are required to serve in the military. However, the military still needs to know the name of every male citizen and alien living in the United States in case there would be the need for a military draft in the future.

Every adult should have someone identified who would make medical decisions in the event of an emergency and the person was unable to make their own decisions. This decision should be in writing and should clearly name someone to have Power of Attorney for Health Care. This is important because even if you make all of your own decisions, if there was an accident or illness where you were not able to do so, important medical decisions about your care could be affected.

It is extremely important to have discussions with your family members and others you trust to get the best information possible about the legal and decision making aspects of adult life. Talk with your parents. You can also ask a social worker or care coordinator at your clinic or hospital for information and assistance. If you have a county social worker or case manager that person can also help you.