Questions to Ask a Financial Planner

(Prepare for a meeting)

Overview

Not all financial planners understand disability benefits, Medicaid rules, or special needs planning. These questions will help you quickly identify whether a planner is a good fit and ensure the meeting stays focused on practical next steps.

Bring this list to your appointment and take notes directly on it.

Before you start: what to share (briefly)

Bring:

- Current benefits (SSI/SSDI, Medicaid, waiver type if applicable)
- Approximate income and savings
- Any expected funds (inheritance, settlement, back pay, home sale)
- Your goals (housing stability, caregiver transition, long-term support)
- Who should be part of the plan (the person, siblings, trustee, supporter)

A) Fit and experience (screening questions)

1. **How often do you work with clients who use SSI and/or Medicaid?**
2. **Do you regularly coordinate with special needs attorneys?**
3. **What is your approach to person-centered planning and involving the individual meaningfully?**
4. **What's your experience with ABLE accounts and special needs trusts?**
5. **What are common mistakes you see families make—and how do you prevent them?**

What you're listening for: clear, confident answers without pressure, and willingness to coordinate with legal supports.

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B) Benefits protection and "what could go wrong"

6. **How will you help us avoid accidental benefit disruption?**
7. **What reporting or redetermination timelines should we plan around?**
8. **How do you plan for emergencies (caregiver illness, sudden housing changes)?**
9. **If the person works or may work, how do you plan around income changes?**

Notes:

C) ABLE accounts (practical questions)

10. **Is the person eligible for ABLE, and how do we confirm eligibility?**
11. **What expenses should we prioritize through ABLE (especially housing)?**
12. **What safeguards do you recommend to prevent misuse or fraud?**
13. **How do you recommend using ABLE alongside a trust (if we have one)?**
14. **What contribution strategy makes sense for our goals and cash flow?**

Notes:

D) Special needs trusts (practical questions)

15. **Do we need a trust now, or should we plan for one later? Why?**
16. **Would you recommend a first-party or third-party trust in our situation?**
17. **What expenses do you commonly see paid through the trust (in real life)?**
18. **How do you help families avoid trust spending problems that affect benefits?**
19. **What makes a strong trustee—and what trustee options exist (family/professional)?**
20. **How do you structure transparency and accountability for trust spending?**

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E) Estate planning coordination

21. **How do you coordinate with our attorney to align the estate plan with benefits?**
22. **What beneficiary designations should we review right away?**
23. **How do we plan for caregiver aging and successor decision-makers?**
24. **How do we protect siblings/supporters from conflict or unclear roles later?**

Notes:____

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F) Planning for the long term (life planning + money planning)

25. **How do you plan for housing transitions and support needs changing over time?**
26. **How do you estimate long-term costs (supports, housing, health needs) realistically?**
27. **What is your recommended "plan in writing" deliverable after this meeting?**
28. **How often do you recommend reviewing the plan—and what triggers an earlier review?**

Notes:____

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G) Fees, scope, and accountability

29. **How are you paid (fee-only, AUM, commissions)? Please explain clearly.**
30. **What services are included—and what is not included?**
31. **What will be the first 3 action steps after this meeting?**
32. **What timeline should we expect for a written plan and follow-up?**
33. **How do you document decisions and keep families aligned?**

Notes:____

Red flags

- Guarantees about benefits outcomes without reviewing details
- Pressure to buy products quickly
- Vague answers about fees
- Dismissal of the person's preferences or communication needs

End-of-meeting checklist (leave with clarity)

Before you leave, confirm:

- **Top 3 priorities** we agreed on
- **Who is responsible** for each next step
- **Documents needed** (benefits summary, legal docs, account statements)
- **Date for follow-up** and what will be delivered in writing