

Resources for the Sandwich Generation

Just when you think you are getting it under control because your kids can dress and feed themselves and you've started a college fund, it happens. Your parent(s) begin to need your help; maybe not financially, but you notice that they are not able to take care of their home like they used to or don't like to drive at night anymore. Sometimes it is the unexpected death of one of your parents that makes you realize that none of us is getting any younger. Welcome to the Sandwich Generation - people who are taking care of kids and taking care of parents.

Unfortunately, like most 'situations' ignoring it and hoping it 'doesn't get that bad' will only make it worse. Without planning your parents could face a scenario of deteriorating health and last minute care decisions. You could face a scenario of jeopardizing your own retirement and eventually becoming a burden to your children in your efforts to take care of your parents. Instead, if you can face it head on and do some planning with your parents you will be ahead of the game emotionally and financially.

In this article you will learn the basic steps in setting up a plan for and with your parents and resources that can help.

How to Prepare

Start by having 'The Talk'. Perhaps in the past your parents have tried to talk to you (and/or your siblings) about their 'financial arrangements' or locations of important documents. Somehow this often brings out a juvenile urge to put your hands over your ears and sing the 'I don't hear you' song. Well, it's time to listen. Talk to your parents about how they are doing financially and what kinds of arrangements or thought they have given to how they will manage as they get older. In addition, discuss your parent's health issues with them. Do they see their healthcare provider(s) regularly? Do they take their medications as prescribed? What, if any, chronic conditions do they have?

If you suspect your parents haven't given any thought to what kinds of challenges they may face as they get older, do some homework on your own first. Using the resources below look up the costs of long term or in home care and educate yourselves on the kinds of benefits that are available to your parents. You do not want to get caught in the trap of sacrificing your children's college or your own retirement security in your efforts to take care of your parents. There are benefits available to senior citizens that are not available to others that can help you care for your parents.

As a part of that discussion, you or a sibling will need the legal authority to act on your parents' behalf if they should become incapacitated. You may want to talk to your siblings before you sit down with your parents so that you can make decisions about who should take what role in helping your parents. If you or your parents don't already have a family attorney, find a reputable attorney near them who can help you with documents as needed. Some of the basic documents you may need include:

- A durable power of attorney giving you the power to pay bills, sign checks and make financial decisions on your parents behalf;
- A healthcare proxy authorizing someone to make medical decisions;
- A Living Will that outlines their wishes regarding life sustaining medical care.

Don't be afraid to discuss and plan for the 'worst case scenario'. No one likes to even say the words 'nursing home' and no one wants to think of their parents (or themselves) needing that level of care. But the reality is that about 60% of North Americans who reach age 65 will need long term care at some time in their lives. Medicare, the primary payment source for elder care in the US, does not cover long term care. This is significant because in the US the average monthly cost for a semiprivate room in a nursing home is \$6,090 or \$74,095 annually. Now consider this: The average annual long-term care premium for individuals under 65 is \$1,337. The average annual premium for individuals over 65 is \$2,862. In addition, most long term care policies also pay for at least a portion of in home care as well. Although most care facilities in in-home care in Canada are subsidized, recent studies show that higher percentages of elder care are being paid by private insurance or individuals.

In Summary, by engaging in proper planning with your parents and using the right resources, you and your parents can plan proper retirements for all of you. See below for lists of resources.

U.S. Resources:

<http://www.aarp.org/families/>

AARP has a variety of resources on all aspects of retirement and care. Their section on 'Family, Home, and Legal' provides clear information and resources on planning for care.

<http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare/Public/Home.asp>

The Eldercare Locator connects older Americans and their caregivers with sources of information on senior services. The service links those who need assistance with state and local area agencies on aging and community-based organizations that serve older adults and their caregivers.

http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org_/articles/revmort/homeMadeMoney.pdf

Clear, unbiased information on Reverse Mortgages from AARP

www.benefitscheckup.org

Developed and maintained by The National Council on Aging (NCOA), BenefitsCheckUp is the nation's most comprehensive Web-based service to screen for benefits programs for seniors with limited income and resources.

http://www.govbenefits.gov/govbenefits_en.portal

This site provides a screening tool for government benefits eligibility and contact information for appropriate programs.

<http://www.medicare.gov/>

This is the Official Medicare site with comprehensive information on Medicare benefits and plans.

<http://www.caremanager.org/index.cfm>

The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers provides referrals to individuals who can help assess your parents' medical needs and finances and then help develop a plan of care appropriate to their needs. This is a private pay, fee based service and initial evaluations can cost \$300.00 with hourly fees for additional services. However, having a thorough evaluation can save you and your parent(s) money in the long run and give you both peace of mind regarding their care.

<http://www.naela.com/>

The National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys provides a search engine to help you find attorneys near you or your parents that specialize in elder issues including estate planning, powers of attorney and more. The site also contains useful articles and resources on related topics.

<http://www.ccal.org/>

Consumer Consortium on Assisted Living is a nonprofit organization that provides information on how to choose a good assisted living facility.