

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Preparing for Your Own Hospitalization: The Caregiver Emergency No One Plans For

You plan for every crisis your adult child might face. The one that keeps you up at night is the one where you're the one who suddenly can't be there. Almost nobody plans for that one specifically.

BY JIM PALASTY · 11 MIN READ · THE PLAN FOR THE EMERGENCY THAT'S ACTUALLY YOURS

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PEOPLE EVERY CAREGIVER EMERGENCY PLAN SHOULD IDENTIFY

Two to three people who could step in within hours, not days. Naming them now, in writing, is the single most protective thing a caregiver can do for a scenario nobody wants to imagine.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

The fear is specific and real

What happens to my adult child if I'm suddenly hospitalized or incapacitated is a scenario nearly every caregiver has imagined at 2 a.m.



STEP 2

An immediate crisis plan changes the outcome

Identifying two or three people who could step in within hours, not days, turns a terrifying gap into a bridge.



STEP 3

Legal preparation makes the plan enforceable

Healthcare proxy, power of attorney, and a backup guardian designation give the emergency plan actual legal weight.

What belongs in your emergency binder

2-3 named emergency contacts	With phone numbers, told directly they're on the list
A one-page care summary	Routines, medications, communication needs, triggers
Legal documents	Healthcare proxy, power of attorney, backup guardian designation
Medical and provider contacts	Your family member's key providers, listed and current
Access information	Where the binder is, and who else knows

THE THREE NAMES THAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE

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Deborah, a single mother, collapsed from what turned out to be a treatable but sudden cardiac event and spent four days in the hospital, unable to communicate for the first day. She had written three names and phone numbers on an index card taped inside her kitchen cabinet, along with a one-page summary of her son's routine. The first person on the list had it running smoothly within six hours of the ambulance leaving.

AN INDEX CARD IN A KITCHEN CABINET DID WHAT FOUR DAYS OF CHAOS COULD HAVE BECOME INSTEAD.

What matters, at a glance

The immediate crisis plan

Two to three specific people who could step in within hours, named directly and told they're on the list, not assumed.

What the emergency caregiver needs

A one-page summary of routines, medications, communication needs, and daily structure, ready before it's needed.

The single-parent dimension is different

Without a second parent to fall back on, this plan isn't optional backup. It's the only plan that exists.

Legal preparation matters

Healthcare proxy, power of attorney, and a backup guardian designation give your emergency plan real legal standing.

Your own preventive care counts too

The checkup you've been postponing is part of this plan. A caregiver who avoids their own care raises the odds of the emergency itself.

The hospitalization itself needs a plan too

What happens to your family member during your hospital stay, not just immediately after, deserves its own specific thought.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

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| ☐ 2-3 named emergency contacts with current phone numbers | ☐ A one-page care summary for your family member |
| ☐ Healthcare proxy and power of attorney documents | ☐ A backup guardian designation, if applicable |
| ☐ A note telling someone else where this plan is stored | |

YOUR MOVE

When you're building your own emergency plan, here is where to start

- 1 Identify 2-3 people who could step in within hours, not days.
- 2 Tell them directly that you're naming them, and confirm they're willing.
- 3 Write a one-page care summary: routines, medications, communication needs.
- 4 Establish healthcare proxy, power of attorney, and backup guardian designation.
- 5 Store the plan somewhere accessible, and tell at least one other person where.
- 6 Schedule the preventive care checkup you've been postponing.

This is the plan for the emergency that's yours, not your child's. It deserves the same seriousness as every other plan you've already built.

CAREGIVER EMERGENCY PLANNING RESOURCES

The Special Needs Alliance (specialneedsalliance.org) provides guidance on healthcare proxy, power of attorney, and backup guardian designation specific to caregivers of adults with disabilities.

Area Agencies on Aging and the ADRC network can sometimes coordinate emergency respite when a caregiver is suddenly hospitalized.

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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