



The 2AM Plan All Caregivers Must Have

By Janice Martin, Owner of Senior Liaison of Central Florida

Anyone would agree that being the full-time caregiver is stressful and exhausting. However, caregivers will usually ignore the effect on their health. Outward appearances are deceiving but the stress from lack of sleep, poor self-care, and the mental exhaustion from being available 24/7 is damaging to anyone's mental and physical health. You may look fine, but you're not.

Even if you have brought care into the home for a few hours to provide some relief, you are never "off duty." If you leave to do some shopping or run errands, you are always waiting for the phone to ring because something has happened. At night, your sleep is often interrupted because one ear is always listening to see if they have gotten out of bed to walk around the house – or worse, out the front door.

If you are the primary caregiver, it is imperative that you have planned for your loved one's care and safety in case something should happen to you. No one has a crystal ball to know when a crisis will occur. Now is the time to make important decisions for everyone's peace of mind.

This is referred to as the 2AM plan. If your loved one cannot be alone, is there a neighbor or friend to initially step in to assist? What if your adult child needs time to plan to leave their family or job responsibilities before being away for an extended amount of time? An advisor such as Senior Liaison will help you to develop a plan based on your wishes. Together you will discuss in-home care options if supervision is needed for several days. They can also assist in selecting an assisted living community for short term or more lengthy stays. There are some preliminary forms that can be completed well in advance. It will be helpful to have something written to communicate your loved ones likes and dislikes such as food, music, movies, etc. Also, share their routine – what time do they get up and go to bed, what time of day do they prefer showers, have they had any prior trauma or triggers to avoid, do they wake up hungry and have to eat right away, or do they generally skip breakfast? These and other important details will allow for a more successful transition to an assisted living. If the goal is that your loved one will move to be closer to family, respite care will be a good alternative while plans are put into place.



Medical and Financial Power of Attorney papers and Advance Directives are required in the event that your loved one is unable to make decisions for themselves. If you do not have these – it is crucial to make this an immediate priority. If your loved one has dementia and you do not have power of attorney for them, things become difficult. An individual can only sign these documents if they understand what they are agreeing to and indicate that they recognize a person as someone they trust. If not and their dementia is advanced, the only option is the costly process of guardianship. Power of attorney is much easier, less time consuming, and less expensive. It's a good practice to assign an adult child or other trusted person as an alternate Power of Attorney in the event of your death or incapacity.

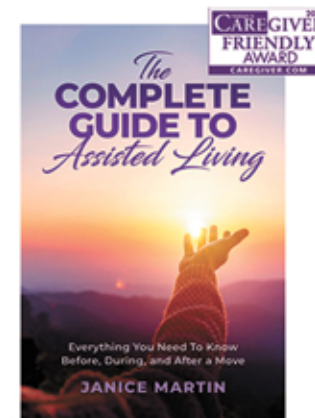
If there is a need to move to memory care in an assisted living community, there must be a power of attorney or guardian. Simply being the spouse or next of kin does not give anyone the authority to sign documents. Someone moving to assisted living may sign their own move in documents, but only the power of attorney or guardian may sign for memory care. Written documentation must be provided – not just someone saying they have it. Make sure these documents are accessible so they may be easily located.

Additionally, you must provide proof of financial power of attorney if access is needed to bank accounts to provide financial resources for payment of any care services, either temporarily or long term. It will also be necessary to obtain access to safety deposit boxes, or to apply for Medicaid or Veteran's benefits.

I have created "In Case of Emergency Documents" to consolidate and communicate important information. It's available as a free download at www.SeniorLiaisonCFL.com. Enter a list of medications, allergies, emergency contact information, and

where to find important documents. It will also indicate if your loved one has dementia or communication deficits so EMTs may recognize any impairment. I suggest you place it in a plastic sleeve and put it on the front of your refrigerator. Also included is a card to put in your wallet indicating that you are the caregiver of someone who may be at home alone and who to contact to provide access to your home.

It has been my experience that far too many people wait for a crisis before making important decisions. If someone else's care is at stake, it is critical that you take some time to work with someone you trust to act on your behalf if and when that crisis occurs. We all hope it never needs to be implemented, but if it does, your loved one will be grateful that you thoughtfully and lovingly took the time to plan for their care and safety.



Janice Martin is an author, educator, and specialist on senior living options and the owner of Senior Liaison of Central Florida Inc. She assists families in locating senior options either at home or to a community and has written "The Complete Guide to Assisted Living: Everything You Need to Know Before, During, and After a Move" available on Amazon.com. For more information, call 352-477-1866 or visit www.seniorliaisoncfl.com.



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