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ARE YOU A TRADITIONAL, CLUB OR AN OPEN-FACED SANDWICH?

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If you are between the ages of 40 to 70 and care for a parent while supporting your own children, you are among the 47% of Americans who are the “Sandwich Generation.” According to a 2013 report from the Pew Research Center,¹ you may be classified as one of these sandwich types:

1. Traditional Sandwich:

A Traditional Sandwich: an adult with aging parents who requires care or help with their own children. This term was initially introduced by Dorothy Miller, holder of a Master of Science in Social Work, and Elaine Brody in 1981.

2. Club Sandwich:

Those in their 40s to 60s sandwiched between aging parents, adult children and grandchildren, or those in their 20s to 40s with young children, and aging parents and grandparents, as described by Carol Abaya, an authority on elder care, in 1992.

3. Open-Faced Sandwich:

Anyone involved in elder care, also by Carol Abaya in 1992.

You play a very important role in the lives of your loved ones, and it is important that you have the right knowledge on how to deal with your position with confidence. Like many things in life, dealing with potential problems in a proactive – rather than reactive - way, tends to be much more effective and extremely less stress provoking for all involved.

¹ <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/01/30/the-sandwich-generation/>

² https://www.jstor.org/stable/23712207?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

³ <http://www.sandwichgeneration.com/about.htm>

⁴ <http://www.sandwichgeneration.com/about.htm>

One thing you can do to ensure the health and financial security of your parents when you are a Sandwich Generation caregiver feeling squeezed at both ends is to make sure that your parents have a proper estate plan in place. If there is no estate plan in place, it is crucial that you take control of the situation and rely on experienced estate planners for help. The four essential components for a comprehensive estate plan are a Financial Power of Attorney, a Medical Power of Attorney, a Last Will and Testament, and a Revocable Living Trust.

In a Financial Power of Attorney, an agent is named to act for your parents if they become incapacitated, or, an agent can be named to act immediately for your parents regardless of their mental capacity. The agent is authorized to manage your parents' property, open their mail, pay their bills, do further estate planning on their behalf, handle long-term care planning, and attend to any other financial matters that may arise.

In a Medical Power of Attorney, an agent is authorized to communicate decisions about all aspects of your parents' health care if they become incapacitated. This document also includes advanced healthcare directives, which concern end-of-life situations and are sometimes referred to as living wills, and HIPAA privacy releases. Without a comprehensive Medical Power of Attorney, healthcare providers and institutions may not be able to discuss your parents' health care with you. This can result in a court process that effectively shuts you out of your parents' health care matters.

Formats for Financial and Medical Powers of Attorney vary from state to state. Therefore, it is important to make sure that not only are these documents in place but that they also are up-to-date with successive levels of agents listed and drafted for the state in which your parents reside.

Having Powers of Attorney to speak on your parents' behalf is critical to deal with their expenses, assets, and healthcare, and is important to ensure a proactive approach to handling your parents' matters. Powers of Attorney are also important for your children who are more than 18 years old. Even though they are your children, they are legally adults and you have no inherent authority to act on their behalf or even get their medical information. As a result, it is recommended that your adult children have their own Medical and Financial Powers of Attorney.

A Last Will and Testament is essentially a letter to the probate court directing where probate assets are to be distributed and who shall act as executor for the probate proceeding. A Last Will and Testament is vital since a need for probate could arise in

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certain circumstances. However, most people pursue a plan that includes a Revocable Living Trust to avoid probate to the greatest extent possible.

A Revocable Living Trust is the foundation of an estate plan designated to avoid probating assets at death. It contains instructions for using your parents' assets for their care upon incapacity, as well as instructions for the distribution of their assets upon their death. A Revocable Living Trust allows your parents to keep their instructions and financial affairs private and ensures that their instructions are carried out efficiently without unnecessary probate court involvement.

If your parents already have an estate plan in place, you are one step ahead of the majority of the Sandwich Generation. In this case, it would be wise to talk to your parents about it and find out who is designated within the plan as their financial agents, medical agents, executors, and successor trustees. This information is often not given in advance, but it will save the family a lot of inconvenience and stress if it is discussed beforehand.

It is also valuable to know where your parents' important documents are, including their estate planning documents, so you have access when you need the documents the most. For instance, it is a good idea to have copies of your parents' Medical Powers of Attorney readily accessible in cases of emergency. Many people keep a copy stored on their phones. There are also apps available that store vital information on medical history and medicines, which can be accessed immediately. Other important documents include recent tax returns, insurance policies, titles to vehicles, and deeds to real estate. Creating and keeping a list of crucial information, such as mortgage payments, bank accounts, safe deposit boxes, and the like, can be very helpful. Also, it is important to make sure that assets are properly incorporated into your parents' estate plan through proper titling. For example, making sure real estate and accounts are titled in the trust or are subject to a beneficiary designation in favor of the trust. Estate plans should be reviewed periodically to make sure the documents are consistent with applicable law and reflect your parents' current wishes. Being prepared is the best way to ensure that your parents' wishes are fulfilled.

Overall, as our parents' age, they depend on us to assist with their care, be it health or financial. By making sure that all necessary estate planning documents are in place and up to date, you will reduce any unnecessary burdens, and prepare yourself, your family, and your parents to welcome their age with ease and be able to enjoy the "sandwich."

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