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THE SANDWICH GENERATION SURVIVAL GUIDE: PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR SANITY

If your typical Wednesday involves writing a college tuition check in the morning and interviewing in-home nurses for your parents by lunch, then you are officially part of the "Sandwich Generation." It is a role rooted in deep family loyalty, but let's be honest: Being in the middle can feel more like a pressure cooker than a privilege. Between the emotional weight and the financial complexity, it is easy to feel like you are constantly reacting to the next crisis instead of living your own life.

The good news? A proactive estate plan can turn that daily "squeeze" into a manageable, intentional strategy.

It starts with the "oxygen mask" rule: Secure your own foundation before helping others. Prioritizing your retirement and emergency savings is not selfish. It is one of the most important gifts you can give your children. It also ensures you will not become a financial burden later. Just as critical is having your own legal documents in place, including updated durable and healthcare powers of attorney. Without them, a sudden health crisis could force your family into a costly, public court process simply to make basic decisions on your behalf.

As you turn to your aging parents, the challenge becomes a delicate balance of support and respect. It is rarely comfortable to ask, "Where do you keep your will?" But waiting until a medical emergency or sudden death makes the question unavoidable is far worse. Ensuring your parents have proper legal documents in place allows you to step in when needed, without unnecessary delays or legal barriers. These conversations may be difficult, but they prevent the kind of legal and emotional vacuum that can overwhelm families in a crisis.

At the same time, you are likely working to build a launchpad for your children. Balancing education costs with your own long-term security requires discipline and strategy. While students can borrow for college, you cannot borrow for retirement. That reality makes tax-advantaged tools, like 529 plans, essential for saving efficiently and an important consideration for overall planning strategies. And if you have concerns about how future inheritances will be managed, a thoughtfully structured trust can ensure your assets are used for meaningful milestones, such as education, a first home, or starting a business, rather than lost to creditors or impulsive decisions.

Looking ahead to the remainder of 2026 and beyond, there are even more sophisticated ways to coordinate support across generations. For example, paying tuition or medical expenses directly to a provider allows you to provide significant financial assistance without using your lifetime gift tax exemption. You may also consider trust-based planning designed as a comprehensive safety net, one that supports you, your parents, and your children if you are temporarily sidelined by illness or incapacity. Even maximizing a health savings account can create a powerful, tax-efficient resource for managing current and future medical costs.

Ultimately, life in the “sandwich” is demanding. It does not, however, have to feel overwhelming. With a clear plan in place, you can replace constant uncertainty with confidence and transform reactive decision-making into thoughtful, long-term strategy. The result is more than peace of mind; it is the ability to care for the people you love without losing sight of your own future.

O’Neil Cannon’s Estate and Business Succession Planning Group can advise and assist you and your loved ones with your estate planning.