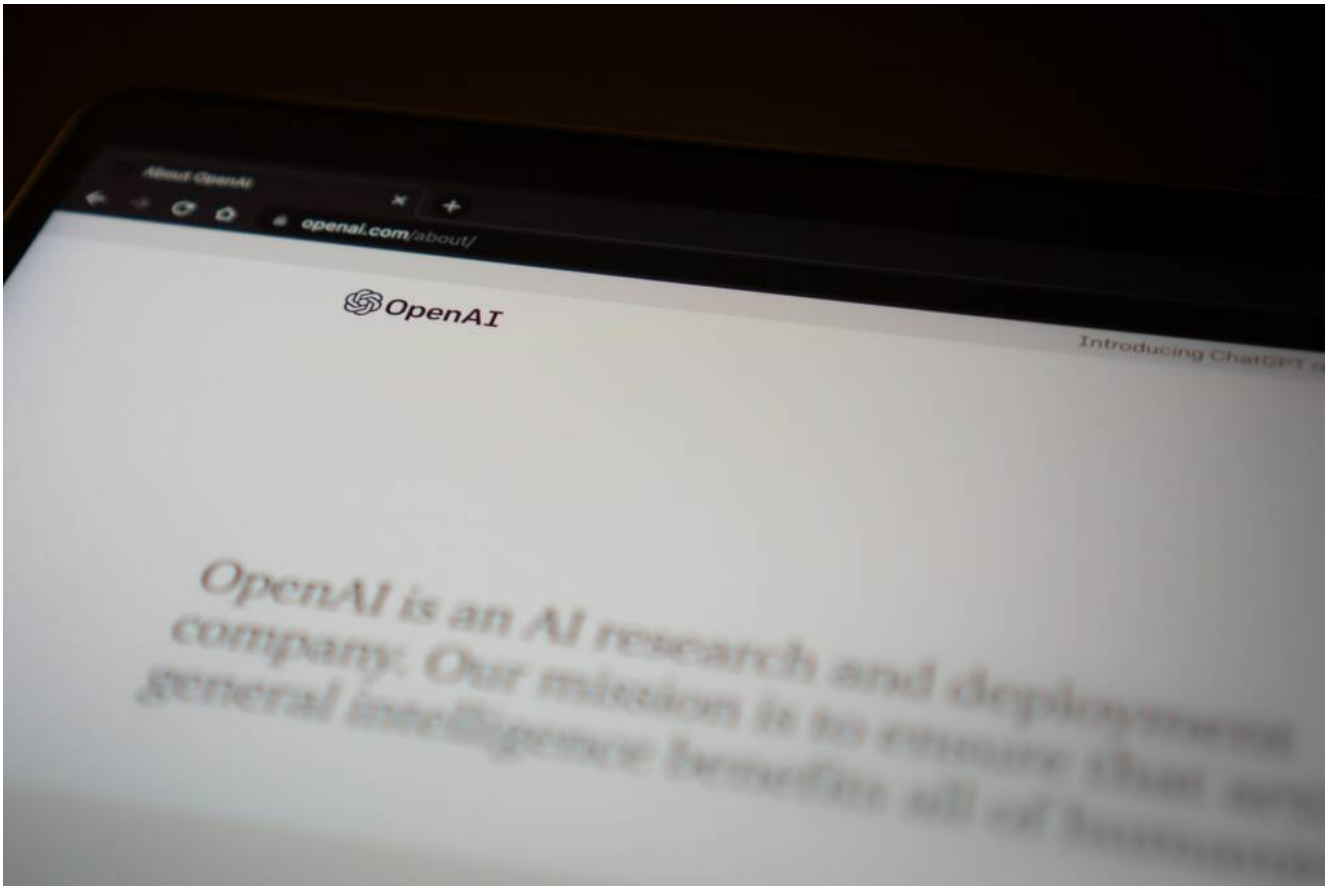
# Where does AI Fit In your life?




There’s been so much chatter about potential drawbacks of AI like ChatGPT and Google Bard that many people are overlooking how AI can improve certain aspects of their lives. From automating mundane tasks to performing more efficient internet searches, there are almost limitless applications for these services – if you know how to get the most out of them.

This brief guide to AI will give you a better understanding of what AI can and can’t do, as well as prompts you can try to free up some valuable time at work and at home.

**What AI does well.**

You’re probably familiar with the most common use case for AI: ask ChatGPT or Bard a question or give it a topic to write about, and it composes a reply of around 500 words. AI is also

very good at summarizing longer text, proofreading, and translating. Another group of AIs, such as Midjourney, can create pictures and songs based on prompts. Computer programmers and website designers can also use AI to generate computer code and troubleshoot errors.

**What AI doesn’t do well (yet).**

Ask ChatGPT, “Which country won the 2023 Women’s World Cup?” and it replies, “I’m sorry, but I do not have information on events that occurred after my last knowledge update in September 2021.” Some AI can supplement their answers with up-to-date internet searches, but results still need human oversight to check for accuracy.

While AI is good at searching its available databases, finding patterns, and providing basic answers, it doesn’t have the ability to “think” about what you’re asking it. Nuance and context can get lost, as can the need for an emotional response such as empathy or humor. Because it’s just scanning for information, AI also doesn’t really have the ability to judge or make decisions about the information it’s providing. Leading questions with baked-in biases are going to lead the AI to find information that confirms those biases.

Finally, much of the writing AI produces reads like it was written by, well, a computer. Again, AI output needs that human touch in order to speak in your brand’s voice or to reflect your unique personality.

**A.I. for Business**

Having said that, AI text can still make for a pretty decent rough draft.

Ask AI to write your next blog, email campaign, or a series of social media tweets. For better results, ask the AI follow-up questions or break down long topics into smaller prompts. If you’re a travel agent and ask AI, “Write a blog about why the

Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Niagara Falls are good vacation destinations," you'll get about 500 words. If you ask about each place one by one, you'll get about 1500 words to work with.

AI is also a great brainstorming partner. Ask it to help you draft a business plan or come up with blog topics that will appeal to your customer niche.

Entrepreneurs and CEOs who really want to turbocharge growth should consider connecting more specialized AI tools to their marketing and customer acquisition pipelines. Work with a third-party consultant or add a Chief AI Officer to your c-suite.

**A.I. for Home**

Is your meal rotation getting stale? Tell GPT what's on your usual shopping list and it will whip up a new weekly menu, including recipes.

Not making the best use of your mornings? Ask ChatGPT to help you create a new morning routine with time for eating, exercise, and some peace and quiet.

Need activity suggestions for your kid's birthday party? ChatGPT will give you a list and draft the invites.

Looking for accurate and up-to-date financial advice?

Step away from the chatbot.

AI might be able to tell you what a Roth IRA is. But it won't be able to tell you how each piece of your financial plan works together to create a better plan for your life.

Let AI handle some of the small stuff. For answers you can trust about the big moments when life and money intersect, give us a call.

# Develop Healthy Hobbies as a Family



We may feel like we spend lots of time with our family members. But squeezing in a few hugs and meals on our way to and from work, school, and soccer practice isn’t really the same as scheduling meaningful family time. Developing family hobbies can help you all spend more purposeful time together, improve your family’s well-being, and find new ways to connect.

Mix and match a few of these ideas to find some go-to family hobbies, rain or shine.

## The Great Outdoors

### Hiking and Nature Walks

Explore local parks and nature reserves. Plan a family camping trip. Or just take weekly walks together through your neighborhood. Walking and hiking can also be the first steps towards other activities, like eating at local restaurants or heading to the park for a game of touch football.

### Biking

Whether it’s a leisurely neighborhood ride or a mountain biking adventure, cycling is a fun and healthy family activity. Like walking, you can organize family trips around biking and take some rewarding pit stops along your route.

### Gardening

Put that overgrown corner of your yard to good use. Few things make little kids happier than a shovel and a patch of dirt. Older kids, parents, and grandparents can plot out what you’re going to grow and work out a schedule to share watering and pruning duties. Put a big family meal on the calendar for harvest time and share your leftover bounty with friends, family, and neighbors.

## Getting Creative

### Arts and Crafts

Set up a dedicated space in your home where everyone can let their creativity run wild. Whether it’s painting, drawing, or crafting, encourage each family member to explore and have fun. A great way to start is to find a drawing book or website that offers “daily doodles” and buy everyone a sketchpad.

### Photography

It’s easy enough to pass around a cell phone or an old digital

camera to preserve family memories. But a couple YouTube lessons could teach you and your older kids the basics of composition, lighting, editing, and publishing to a digital family photo album.

**Music**

If you have some old instruments lying around the house, cue up YouTube and learn the basic chords of a favorite song. Parents and grandparents who do know how to play can show youngsters the basics, which could lead to a new passion.

## Fun Around the Kitchen Table

**Cooking and Baking**

Turning meal prep into a family activity can limit trips to the drive-thru, teach everyone some new skills, and encourage healthier eating habits. Pick one or two nights every week when a family member can break up your regular meal rotation with something new. Take a weekly trip to the farmer’s market and follow fresh inspiration where it leads.

**Games and Puzzles**

When was the last time you gathered around a classic like Monopoly or Scrabble? Puzzles and Lego sets can also be great fun for families who need to turn down the competitive heat. Aspiring “dungeon masters” can run family-friendly role-playing games that turn game night into an epic story and encourage family members of all ages to find creative ways around that sleeping dragon.

**Reading and Writing**

A lifelong love of reading is often inherited from parents and grandparents. Take family trips to the library or local bookshop. Share news stories relevant to everyone’s interests. Start a family book club or organize your own reading around what your kids have been assigned at school.

Sometimes it’s too easy to hustle and bustle right past things that matter the most. Our planning tools can give you a new perspective that will help you spend both your time and your money in ways that will more align with your values.

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# Not Your Typical Daddy/Daughter Date



*Aaron recently returned from a Vision Trip with the non-profit organization, International Justice Mission. He was joined on this trip by his daughter Ellianna, who shares more about their journey below.*

This IJM Ghana trip was stressful, agitating, and uncomfortable, but that is what made it so wonderful. I was repulsed at the pungent smells and claustrophobia brought to life by the tour at Elmina Castle; my heart was broken for the cheerful survivors dancing at the aftercare center; itching guilt overwhelmed my body as I sat cruising Lake Volta while taking pictures of possible child labor victims. Tears were shed, and boundaries were broken. It was good.

Through my discomfort came life-long relationships and a desire for change. It made me realize that sometimes the only way to make a change is not to bask in our comfort, but to meditate in our discomfort. We cannot stay in the celebration of one God-given victory or never challenge ourselves and others for justice, for then there would be no further change. The cycle must persist. It is not easy work, which is something the IJM Ghana team is well aware of. Below, I will walk through my thoughts and emotions by witnessing a glimpse of IJM's work and the reasons behind their passion.

For a little under a week, I was part of a group of Americans who had the opportunity to tour IJM's work in Ghana. Briefly explained, IJM combats various forms of modern-day slavery in 17 different countries, but this trip was focused on child trafficking in Ghana's Lake Volta fishing industry. The trip began with Ghana's slave history and then worked its way through IJM's current progress to its future goals. On our first day, we were taken to Elmina Castle, previously known as a trading post for slaves. As we walked through with relative ease and took pictures of children playing outside its walls, it was impossible not to think about the inhumane practices that were inflicted on people not too long ago. We had stood in one of the small cells where as many as 200 tattered slaves were kept, but here claustrophobia was the least of their worries. Bodily fluids and toxic gasses created a bed for disease. Scraps of food that seldom dropped from the ceiling weakened the body. Sexual abuse tore through skin, bone, and

dignity.

The conditions were horrible, but one thing killed hope more than the rest: the Door of No Return. As the name insinuates, when someone stepped through that door, they never returned. They would be stacked like Jenga blocks in a ship that sent them to various places to be further enslaved, further beaten, and further oppressed. If they did not die in the castle or the ship, they would most likely die in their new forever home.



The "Door of no return"

We returned to the bus and I sat still, attempting not to confront all that we had learned. Why? Because I knew if I did it would become a reality. I did not want the treacheries they experienced to be true. I did the same thing when we played with the survivors at the aftercare center and when we admired the beauty of Lake Volta. All I wanted to see was children finding joy in the Lord as they put on a show for us and taught us childhood games. I didn't want to see the beatings on the children's skin or the trauma they experienced when their best friend never returned from the water. I wanted to ignore the fact that I saw children fishing in the rain on a

school day. We were being shown the beauty of God's accomplishments through IJM, and I wanted to stay in that beauty.

But at a specific point on our boat ride, I finally wanted to jump into the cloudy waters and swim over to the fishing children to accompany them. It was when a canoe was close enough for me to see two sets of raw palms waving at us. But they didn't wave with the common emotion of excitement, rather they had a flat face and only waved to say, "I'm here. Please, notice me." I was embarrassed at the sight of our motorized boat among the canoes and people's worry about our dry state while soaked children worked to keep their canoe from drowning. Don't get me wrong, I am grateful for the beautiful experience and generous hospitality, but I am also enraged by how different my life is from theirs.

While this trip has angered me, it has also given me hope. Throughout our time there, we had an abundance of food. I forgot what it was like to be hungry. Although I could not keep up with the frequent supply of amazing food, I was grateful for the time spent at meals and the welcoming culture I experienced. It is a beautiful culture, one that I am now missing as I am back in America. Food was used to welcome us and bring us together (I don't know how to grammatically put Akwaaba into a sentence, but this is where I would use it). At our meals, I met many people that I would now like to consider my family and learned many things about Ghana's beautiful culture. We were taught to dance, carry a bag on our head, how communal Ghanaians are, and how important the day of the week you were born on is (long live Thursdays!).

However, the most important thing I learned at a meal is how God is working wonders through every IJM member to restore justice. On the last day, our American crew joined the whole IJM Ghana team at a retreat. Of course, there was song and dance. The most entertaining part was how stiff we Americans looked on the dance floor, but the most powerful part was the

worship. You could hear in the singer's voice that she was not singing from her mouth, but from her soul, in a determined effort to reach God. She was reaching others too. When I looked around, people were moved. Hands were raised to the sky in praise and lowered to the ground in humility. Many were crying, and so was I. I was crying because we were given a beautiful gift: hope. I could see how these people truly believed in what they were doing and the power of God. There is a chance for a brighter future because the light of God shines through these people.

Throughout the entirety of the trip, I prayed that I would not leave it unchanged. I was nervous that I would act as many would after a church service: raise our hands during worship, say a couple of amens, comment on the pastor's preaching abilities, and then go home to complain about the AC not working, forgetting everything until the next Sunday. It is a cycle that goes nowhere, and that is what I am still afraid of (hopefully others are as well) for me and this Ghana trip. I hope my fear increases and that I will channel it for good. I hope my desires will turn into action rather than remain thoughts. I hope I will share my experiences and not selfishly keep them to myself to remain comfortable and avoid confrontation. I hope I will let God take over and put the entirety of my faith in him. And I hope my hopes are also others' hopes. If so, restoration will shine through the darkness.

You can learn more about IJM at IJM.org.

# 5 Steps to Address Concerns About an Aging Parent



As your parents begin to settle into their final phase of life, their health, residence, and finances could become a factor in your retirement planning. This is especially true if you are the person your parents have tasked with settling their estates.

There’s no simple way to tackle all the logistical and emotional challenges associated with caring for an aging parent. But these five steps will help you get the help you’ll need to make sure your parent is safe, cared for, and financially secure.

**1. Call a family meeting.**

No two families are the same, but in most cases, you’re going to want to gather together all siblings and close family members for an open and honest discussion. If your parent is dealing with a serious and potentially debilitating health

issue, don’t sugar-coat the truth. Hiding the facts now will only lead to hurt feelings, resentment, and poor planning.

Depending on the parent’s condition, you might consider dividing up a caregiving or visitation schedule. Even pitching in on small day-to-day tasks like helping mom or dad buy groceries can be a big help.

If you’re contemplating a more serious decision, like assisted living, make sure you give everyone space to voice an opinion. Try to keep the conversation as positive and solution-focused as possible. Employing a mediator or family counselor to facilitate might be a good option if you’re concerned old family issues could boil over and prevent a solid resolution.

**2. Don’t try to parent.**

Shifting from the role of adult child to caregiver is going to be a difficult transition for both you and your parent. Don’t try to do too much too soon. Seniors who feel like they’re being “babied” are prone to depression or dangerous outbursts of independence, like grabbing the car keys or refusing to take medication.

A better approach is to try to frame your caregiving as a way of being more involved in your parent’s current routine. Take a seat at Dad’s weekly card game. Put the grandkids’ sports and performance events on the calendar and offer transportation. Bring an extra dish to a dinner party. Drive mom to the movies … and let a sibling know the house will be unoccupied for a few hours if there are any cleaning or hoarding issues that need attention.

**3. Gather the essentials.**

If your parent doesn’t keep all important documents in one location, now is the time to collect, copy, and file things like:

- Identification (driver’s license, passport, birth certificate, marriage certificate, etc.)
- Bank records
- Home deeds and vehicle titles
- Insurance records
- Investment and retirement account records
- Wills and trusts
- Power of attorney
- End of life directives
- Login information for important online accounts (banking, subscriptions, social media)

There may be other documents that are unique to your parent’s living or financial situation. We can help you make a comprehensive list.

**4. Tag along.**

Start attending doctor’s appointments. Don’t be afraid to ask questions that will help you familiarize yourself with your parent’s medical condition and aid with any at-home care like prescription drugs.

Also, ask your parent to introduce you to his or her financial advisor and attorney. Make sure the relevant professionals have all the important information about changes to your parent’s health, mental capacity, or living situation.

**5. Plan for the next steps.**

At some point, your aging parent may no longer be self-sufficient. The earlier that you and your close family members decide upon an action plan, the better. Do you or anyone in your family have the room, the time, and the means to take in your parent? How can non-caregiving siblings or other family members chip in on associated costs of living?

In many cases, an assisted living facility is a more realistic option. But be aware that your parent’s Medicare plan probably

will not cover those costs. If your parent does not have retirement funds earmarked for end-of-life care, you and your close family members may need to hold another meeting to discuss how to pay for a facility.

None of these steps are easy, and none of the associated options your family settles on will be perfect. The sooner you loop us in on how caring for an aging parent might affect your financial picture, the sooner we can get to work on the money side so that you can concentrate on giving your family the love and support it needs during this difficult time.

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# What Should You Consider Before Relocating for Your Career?



According to a report published by Bloomberg, only 1.6% of job seekers relocated to take a new job in Q1 2023, an all-time low. More folks than ever value the freedom to work when, how, and where they want. Compromising on that freedom isn't just about what's best for your career. It's a question of how relocating will affect your life in three important areas.

**1. Family**

Relocating will be a life-changing event for your spouse and children. They'll lose the daily network of friends and family they've come to rely on and with whom they spend their leisure time. Younger children may adapt to these changes quickly, while older children or your spouse might struggle to make new connections. Social media could help your family maintain some of those existing relationships. It could also make you all miss your old home even more.

Your family will also have to build new relationships adjacent to friends and family, such as doctors, teachers, teammates, coaches, and babysitters. Relocating could also cause a strain

on your extended family, especially if you have caregiving responsibilities with elderly family members.

Navigating these changes won't necessarily be all bad. A fresh start could give your family a chance to have new experiences, broaden your view of the world, discover new hobbies and interests, and connect with new people who will enrich your lives in unexpected ways.

**2. Careers**

Whether you're thinking about moving for a new job or to maintain your career track at your existing employer, you might start by asking yourself if this move is a choice or a necessity. Again, in this day and age, workers can have a lot more say in the logistics of their jobs. What aspects of this job truly couldn't be managed from your current place of residence? Could you perform a similar job at a different company without moving? On the other hand, what kinds of professional experiences could you gain that would make relocating worthwhile? Could moving open up a path toward your dream job?

If your spouse works, discuss these same career questions with him or her. While you each have your own career goals, it's important that you are aligned on how you will continue to work together as a couple to achieve them.

**3. Finances**

Even if relocating comes with a significant salary bump, moving can be expensive. In the short term, you'll have to budget for expenses like shipping your stuff, traveling, selling your old house, and finding new housing.

In the long term, you'll have to consider the effects of relocating on your monthly and annual budget. The cost of living could be different in a new state or city, including the price of groceries, utilities, and entertainment. Even

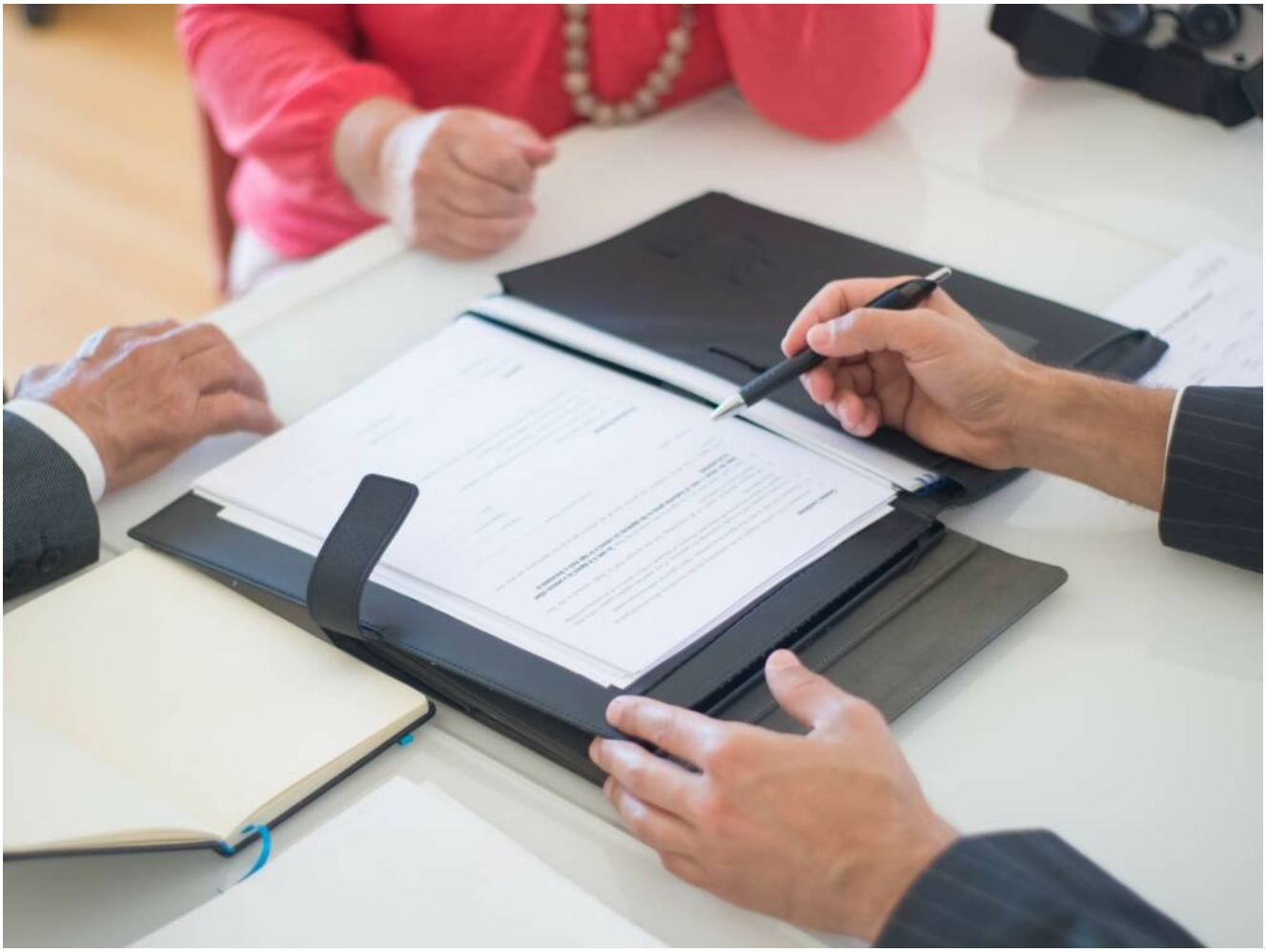
with employer-subsidized insurance, your healthcare costs could change, especially if you or someone in your family has an ongoing medical condition or regularly takes prescription drugs. Changes to your salary could change your tax situation. You might need to reevaluate your current savings and investment strategy to make sure that you're allocating your earnings in the most advantageous ways possible.

A little further down the road, relocating could also affect the cost of college for your kids. You and your spouse might also start to rethink some of your retirement goals, including where you ultimately want to live in your golden years.

Moving or relocating is one of many of life's transitions. The process at WaterRock is designed to help our clients navigate through each one. If you have a relocation or other transition in your life, set up a call and we can talk through all your potential challenges and opportunities.

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# Ensure Your Life Wishes Are Granted Through Effective Estate Planning



Legacy planning is often the last piece folks tackle in their financial planning because it’s the least appealing to think about.

Planning for a robust nest egg that will keep you safe, secure, and fulfilled when you stop working? Fun!

Deciding what to do with your assets when you’re no longer around to enjoy them? Not so much.

But if you put off your legacy planning too long, you run a real risk of leaving behind nothing but headaches for your loved ones. It feels like the least important item on your to-do list until it becomes the most important and you can’t do anything about it.

Here’s a quick checklist that will help you and your spouse outline a legacy plan that will protect your assets, care for each other in the event of incapacitation, and give you both

some peace of mind.

**1. Create a balance sheet.**

Maybe the best way to ease into this process is to set aside emotion for a moment and get the raw numbers on paper.

Start by adding up all your assets, including:

- Real estate
- Personal valuables (vehicles, jewelry, etc.)
- Bank accounts
- Investment accounts
- Retirement plans (401(k), IRA, pension, etc.)
- Business interests (ownership, equipment, etc.)
- Benefits payable upon death (life insurance, Social Security, etc.)

From this total, subtract your liabilities, such as:

- Credit card debt
- Mortgage
- Vehicle loans
- Personal loans

This simple balance sheet should give you a rough idea of your net worth. It will also give you a list of items you'll want to consider passing down to heirs, and a list of debts you might want to work on paying down.

**2. Determine what plans you have and what plans you need.**

At the bare minimum, everyone should have:

- **Last Will and Testament**, which details how you want your assets distributed to heirs and charitable organizations.
- **Power of Attorney**, which authorizes someone of your choosing to act on your behalf if you're incapacitated.
- **Health Care Directive**, which details what kind of care

you want should you become incapacitated.
- **Living Will**, which authorizes someone to make medical decisions for you if you can't, based upon what's stipulated in your health care directive.

Any of these documents that you don't have, you should get working on.

If you have any older versions of these documents that you haven't looked at in a few years, you should review them to make sure they're up to date.

**3. Discuss your legacy wishes with your spouse.**

Now comes the tough part – filling in all the blanks.

Like every other part of your retirement planning, clear and open communication with your spouse is key. If you're having trouble opening this line of dialogue, here are some questions to get you started:

- *Do we have all our important documents (personal ID, bank accounts, legacy documents, etc.) organized in one place?*
- *Who should execute our will?*
- *Who are our key beneficiaries? What do we want to leave them?*
- *What charities or causes would we like to support with our legacy?*
- *What are our medical wishes in the event one or both of us become incapacitated?*
- *If one of us passes, where will the surviving spouse live?*

**4. Meet with professionals.**

Again, we understand that these are difficult questions to tackle. Many folks prefer to tell themselves, *"I won't be around, I don't care, the good kid will take care of it."*

Unfortunately, your state of residence doesn’t consider this a legal estate plan. If you don’t have all your essential documents in order when you pass, the state will settle your estate according to local law. In even the closest families, this process can get really messy once the courts start deciding where your assets will end up.

We believe that part of living the best life possible with the money you have is putting a plan in place that will extend your legacy for years to come, while also making a difficult time a little bit easier on your loved ones. The best way to achieve this goal is to work through these hard questions and then bring a “rough draft” of your legacy plan to us.

If you’re not sure where to start, we have a process for thinking through and asking these hard questions with you. We can help finalize any lingering details, facilitate any challenging discussions, and connect you with legal professionals who will make sure your legacy is executed the right way when the time comes.

*This article was prepared for Aaron Larson’s use.*

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# 4 Things to Consider Before Committing Financial Support to Your Adult Children



A large part of being a parent is making our children's lives easier which often comes in the form of committing financial support to those adult children. But before writing a check or making a deposit through Venmo to your children, ask yourself these four key questions:

**1. What, specifically, is this money for?**

The key word here is SPECIFICALLY.

Many parents tend to err on the side of protecting their child's feelings when weighing financial support. We know asking for money can be embarrassing, and we don't want to deepen that embarrassment. Or we're worried that if we ask too many questions the child will become frustrated and hide serious problems from us going forward.

These are understandable concerns. But it's also important that you understand whether your child needs support because of something beyond his or her control (a car accident, serious health issues, unexpected job loss) or because they're struggling with basic adult responsibilities. If your child is

making poor budgeting decisions or settling for underemployment, you may be throwing good money after bad.

Be tactful but get to the root problem before you decide if your money is the best solution.

**2. What is the real cost to me?**

Many parents are already helping their adult children more than they realize.

For example, you might not think much of letting your adult children stay on the family cell phone plan or piggyback on an HBO subscription. After all, it’s only twenty bucks a month, right?

But how long have you been giving your child that monthly free pass? Years? You can also set time limits. For example, tell your child they can remain on the family cell phone plan until age 25 or until they get married, whichever comes first.

Are you helping with larger monthly expenses, like student loan or car payments? When will it finally be time to pull the plug?

Our advice: get it all down on paper. Make a spreadsheet that accounts for the financial support you’re already giving your child, large and small. Seeing how even small expenses accumulate over time will be eye-opening for both of you and help inform a good decision.

**3. What are the terms of the bailout?**

This is another area that parents tend to tiptoe around because they’re afraid of insulting their children. But do you know of any bank that’s going to loan your kids money indefinitely, charge no interest, and ask for no repayment? Then why should your money be subject to such lousy terms?

Your children have to understand that your generosity is not

open-ended, especially as you near retirement age. You've probably made many sacrifices for them already. You should not sacrifice your financial security or the nest egg that is meant to support you in retirement.

If your children want you to "be the bank," then you have every right to act like one. Set clear terms in writing, including a repayment schedule. In more serious cases, you might want to bring us a copy of this agreement so that we can include it in your estate plan.

**4. How else can I help?**

It's very likely that your child spent 16 or more years in school without learning a single thing about managing money. Financial literacy just isn't taught in schools. This knowledge gap could be a big reason your young adult is struggling.

Does your child need money suddenly because he or she doesn't know how to budget? Help find that balance between covering current expenses and contributing to savings and investment accounts.

Housing and transportation expenses can be a shock to recent college grads. You could help your child negotiate a car lease. You might help a child who's already chasing after the Joneses by counseling against a rash home purchase that will stretch his or her finances thin.

Introducing your underemployed child to some of your professional connections might lead to a significant career upgrade.

One key connection you should be sure to tap: your team at WaterRock! We're always happy to help our clients' adult children get on their feet. We consider this a service to our clients because we know that the less you're worried about supporting your children, the more secure your own retirement

goals will be.

*This article was prepared for Aaron Larson’s use.*

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# Don’t Forget Those in Need After the Holidays



The outpouring of giving and goodwill during the holidays always makes a special time of the year feel even more precious. Unfortunately, holiday generosity isn’t enough to sustain the important missions that charities and nonprofits carry out during the rest of the year. And as the fellowship of the holidays and the excitement of a New Year begin to fade, the “winter blues” can draw many people away from the

connections and sense of purpose they need to feel happy and fulfilled.

Devoting some of your time or resources to one of these three areas of need could help you to keep growing your impact in your community and in your own home throughout the year.

**1. Food banks and shelters.**

According to the latest data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 13.5 million households struggled to meet their dietary needs at some point during 2021. Those numbers were even higher for households that included children.

Many charitable organizations, such as the Feeding America national network of food banks, try to stem the drop off in post-holiday donations by encouraging folks to sign up for recurring monthly monetary donations. If you have a spare hour or two during the week, most food banks and shelters are also very dependent on volunteers for their operations. You could also start your own monthly neighborhood food drive to encourage more giving and spread awareness of this year-round problem.

**2. Animal shelters.**

Pets are often high on holiday wish lists, especially for children. But many folks who weren't expecting to find a puppy under the tree aren't prepared for the financial, physical, or emotional commitments that pets require. The holidays can also be extremely stressful for young animals that are trying to acclimate to a new place, which can lead to behavioral issues. Sadly, too many of these animals are abandoned or brought to shelters.

That means your local shelter might need a few extra animal lovers or part-time administrators to help these pets find new homes. You could also help by adopting a new pet yourself, provided you and your family are ready to give that animal the

love and care it will need for years to come.

**3. Friends, family, and neighbors.**

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that millions of Americans suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), mood swings that coincide with changing seasons. SAD is most common during the low daylight fall and winter months and can create feelings of low energy, difficulty sleeping, and even depression.

Anyone dealing with severe SAD should talk to their doctor. But if you or someone you know tends to feel a little down once the days get shorter and holiday get-togethers wind down, make an extra effort to reach out. Drop by a friend's house to watch a game on TV. Make plans with your siblings to grab a cup of coffee or get all the little cousins together for a playdate. Check in on homebound seniors on your block and see if they need help getting their mail, picking up groceries, or rolling out their garbage cans. These small moments of kindness and connection can reverberate out into your social circle and echo back to you, adding a little bit of light to help everyone get through the cold months ahead.

One of the most effective ways to create sustainable giving goals and habits is to build them into your financial plan. Whether you want to donate to your local shelter every month or bust those blues by planning a big family vacation, let's discuss some additions to your 2023 Pathway that will help you give and get more with the money you have.

*This article was prepared for Aaron Larson's use.*

# Don’t Let Holiday Stress Get the Best of You




Are you feeling the crunch?

With the holidays in full swing, the stress from all that planning, shopping, entertaining, and traveling might be starting to mount. And in between wrapping presents and baking cookies, you still have work to do, your kids still need help with school, and your heart still needs that 30-minute morning run.

Here are four tips to help you turn down the stress so that you can get more from your holidays.

**1. Stick to a schedule.**

Giving your holidays the same kind of structure that you give

to your normal week can help you get everything done without going crazy. Start by preserving non-negotiables from your regular schedule, like work, driving kids to extracurriculars, doctor appointments, and exercise. Then, add your holiday non-negotiables: parties you're hosting, planes you have to catch, and kid's holiday concerts that you're attending.

Next, block off a few days for shopping, whether online, in-store or both. This shopping schedule will keep you from clicking on every new deal that pops up on your phone while also making sure you cover everyone on your Nice List. From here, you'll have a good idea of when to decorate, bake, stroll the neighborhood to look at the lights, and maybe just take a nap.

**2. Leave work at work.**

Your job might not stop for the holidays, but you should at least be able to pause it for a day or two. Putting in a few extra hours at the office or on your laptop at home to close out a big year-end project might ease some stress and make your holidays more enjoyable.

If someone has to hold down the fort during holiday hours, talk to your coworkers about everyone's party plans and try to work out a schedule so no one misses out. And when you are off the clock, stay off. Power down your computer, put your cell phone out of reach and be truly present with the people who matter the most.

**3. Maintain healthy habits.**

The good news is that the dreaded "holiday weight gain" is a bit of a myth. According to The New England Journal of Medicine, even someone who gorges from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day will probably only gain a pound or two. And if your holiday meals are heavy on starches that you normally limit, like stuffing and rolls, any larger jumps on the scale are probably due to temporary water retention.

The bigger danger to your health over the holidays is that you might fall out of your wellness routine or let some of those holiday treats sneak into your regular diet. Moreover, if you're vulnerable to feelings of stress or depression over the holidays, overindulging at meals could make you feel guilty even if you aren't really hurting your health very much.

In other words, enjoy yourself, but try not to overdo it at the buffet. And while an extra lap around the block might not make that extra slice of apple pie vanish, it will keep you on track for your larger fitness goals and give you some welcome headspace away from all the happy hubbub back at home.

**4. Put a bow on year-end financial tasks.**

If you have a spare hour on your holiday schedule, we'd love to talk to you about some year-end housekeeping that can help you get a jump on 2023. From topping off retirement account contributions to locking in tax deductions on charitable donations and reviewing your estate plan, let us help you take a few things off your to-do list and prep for a successful New Year.

*This article was prepared for Aaron Larson's use.*

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# Give Experiences Not Stuff This Holiday Season



“Does this spark joy?” asks Marie Kondo about our possessions. The answer is usually YES! on Christmas morning or at a holiday party when we unwrap our presents and watch others enjoy their gifts as well. But once the New Year rolls around many of those gifts are fighting for closet space with holiday decorations and all the stuff we keep meaning to donate. And one thing that definitely doesn’t “spark joy” is household clutter.

While the shine tends to wear off presents must faster than we expect, many researchers have concluded that spending money on experiences rather than stuff can create more meaningful and lasting happiness. This holiday season, consider putting money towards one of these gifts to create memories for years to come.

**1. Lessons or classes**

What’s better than buying your spouse his favorite bottle of wine? Tickets to the tasting events at your local wine shop so that you can schedule some date nights, learn something, and

have some fun together. Rather than adding to the stack of stuff that represents your kids' interests, find a class or a teacher who can help them learn more and grow their skills. Maybe it's time to move on from YouTube chord progression videos to a professional guitar teacher. Your in-house gaming addict probably doesn't need another game, but he might enjoy a coding class that will help him create his own and flex those STEM muscles.

**2. Gift cards for a day out**

Once upon a time, buying gift cards to restaurants and theatres might have said, "I didn't know what else to get you." Post-COVID, those gift cards will be a welcome passport to a night outside the house. If you're still worried about making a "last-minute" impression, try to personalize the gift as much as possible. Think favorite restaurants, favorite cuisines, favorite plays or musical artists, or an experience you think someone might enjoy but wouldn't spend money on themselves. Your gift card could spark a new passion for indoor rock climbing or the local opera company in a loved one.

**3. Charitable giving**

It's never too early to involve your children in good works around the holidays. But as they approach adulthood and their consciousness of the world around them begins to grow, kids might value making a positive impact more than a fancy tablet or new clothes. Have a family conversation about the problems facing your community and the issues that your kids are passionate about.

If your family has a personal connection to a cause, talk about how you can honor that connection by donating your time and money. And once your kids are out of school and earning their own paychecks, you might consider working with your advisor to form a family Donor Advised Fund or charitable

trust that will sustain your mission in perpetuity.

**4. An extended family vacation**

If you really want to go all-out for the holidays, schedule what could be a true once-in-a-lifetime experience. Get together as many of your loved ones as you can for that trip you've all been talking about taking for years. Coordinating the logistics will be a lot harder than buying your grandson a new cell phone. But that effort will only make the payoff that much more rewarding.

Before you get too excited about cruise lines or luxury resorts, how about we schedule a meeting to review your holiday gifting and vacation budgets for the next couple of years? We can also revisit your life transitions to talk about any major upcoming expenses and new goals that you want to plot for the year ahead.

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