

LIFE PLANNING FOR YOUR UNIQUE FAMILY



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Life Planning for Your Unique Family

Families with special-needs members face unique challenges that often require meticulous planning to ensure the well-being and quality of life for their loved ones. A life plan, as it is called, serves as a roadmap for addressing the diverse needs and aspirations of individuals with special needs and helps to provide guidance and support for their families.

In this report, we'll explain the All Needs Planning "Master Plan" approach to life planning, which is a high-touch, concierge service that addresses the needs and goals of the entire family. We'll also look more broadly at some of the many considerations that must be included in a comprehensive special needs life plan, and how they are strategically incorporated in your customized Master Plan.

No matter where you are in the life planning process, the Master Plan we help you create through our family office model is customized to your needs and includes a Funding Strategy, a Legal Strategy, and a Support Strategy. Together, these strategies help to ensure you'll have the resources and services you need to meet your needs and achieve your goals as a family.

Developmental Stages

Generally, there are key stages associated with specific planning choices. We describe those here as a foundation to help families understand and orient themselves to how planning evolves over a lifetime. We then go on to explain how our planning process strategically positions and optimizes the resources and supports needed for their loved one:

- **Stage 1: Birth to Age 3:** This is often the time of diagnosis and learning more about your loved one's prognosis. This stage may also involve starting early intervention services; engaging specialists and starting therapies; learning how to implement these procedures at home; and beginning to adjust your home life around the specialized needs of your loved one.
- **Stage 2: Age 3 to 17:** This is often the first big transition period, when preschool services can begin, and when you may start connecting with special education services. It may also be the time in which your home-based services start moving to school- or center-based settings. After age 5, transition planning focuses on identifying resources and educational services designed to improve the outcomes of students with disabilities. It ultimately also involves preparing for the post-secondary transition beyond school, which includes job and living skills preparation.
- **Stage 3: Age 17 to Parents/Caregivers Retirement:** As your child becomes an adult, planning needs may include employment, living arrangements; assisting with decision making; college funding; social and recreational support; Social Security Insurance and Disability Insurance options; and more.
- **Stage 4: Retirement and Rest of Life:** Issues in this stage include your retirement plan; Medicare and Social Security strategies; lifetime supplemental needs; estate planning and remainder interest.

Family-Centered Support

At All Needs Planning we know that a comprehensive special needs life plan must go beyond financial and legal considerations to address a variety of support issues that help ensure the well-being and quality of life of not only your special needs loved one but your entire family. That's why your Master Plan includes a family-centered Support Strategy to specifically address those issues.

What's most important is that the needs of your loved one with a disability drive the funding and legal strategies of your overall Master Plan. Traditionally, most financial and legal strategies are transactional and broad. In a traditional process, the family is often asked how much they want to have for retirement and how much they want to leave behind for their loved one with a disability. It can feel like guesswork, so our approach is different. We offer a way to strategically pinpoint the lifetime costs of care for your loved one that translates into retirement, and we identify the target amounts needed to ensure lifetime support.

This process includes assessing traditional costs such as rent, food, and recreation, as well as the costs of care that you have been providing free, but which may need to be covered when you are no longer able to provide them. For instance, if you typically drive your loved one to therapy and stay during the session, that service may have to be paid for when you are no longer around or able to do it. These are often the kinds of costs that traditional plans miss – and overlooking them could greatly impact your loved one's life experience.

Further, as to your legal planning needs, traditional approaches start with getting your documents in order, followed by an attorney asking such questions as, "Do you want a special needs trust?" and "Will your child need guardianship?" Here again, these approaches can feel like guesswork. Alternatively, our process starts with a deep dive into identifying and understanding the care needs of your loved one.

Every aspect of the Legal Strategy we provide you with is driven by the specialized needs of the individual. We support you by helping you understand the potential legal vulnerabilities of your loved one; what protections they need over their lifetime; how to identify others to be designated in the process; and how to make sure your Legal Strategy is tied to your loved one's support needs and funding needs.

From therapeutic supports to medical coordination, community integration, care planning, and every family member's health and wellness, your support strategy helps ensure that the entire family unit is functioning at its very best. We help you create an infrastructure that ensures your loved one receives the best care possible and minimizes family stress. In short, we work with you to assess the support needs of every member of the family and match their needs to the supports they are currently receiving.

A Broader View

Now, let's look more broadly at some of the key issues that must be addressed in a typical special needs life plan, and which we cover in your comprehensive, customized Master Plan:

Individualized Education and Development Goals

Individuals with special needs often require tailored educational opportunities and specialized resources. Your special needs life plan should:

- Identify specific educational objectives, therapies, and services necessary for the individual's growth and development.
- Establish a timeline for achieving milestones and adapting goals as the individual progresses.
- Coordinate the services and supports through a communication strategy and establish ongoing monitoring.

Financial Planning and Resources

Families navigating the complexities of caring for a special-needs child must approach financial planning with a thoughtful and comprehensive strategy. In this area, your special-needs life plan should:

- Assess current and future financial needs, including medical expenses, therapies, and specialized equipment.
- Investigate government benefits, such as Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and eligibility criteria, as well as Medicaid waiver programs targeted at providing and funding lifelong supports and services.
- Consider the benefits of establishing a special-needs trust or ABLE account to protect assets and ensure financial stability without jeopardizing eligibility for public assistance programs.
- Continually coordinate your special-needs funding strategy with a sound retirement strategy and long-term financial plan for the family.

At All Needs Planning we focus on helping you create a Funding Strategy that is part of your broader financial plan, and which helps you examine, understand, and address all the above issues as they may apply to your situation. For more details on this topic, read our report, "A Guide to Special Needs Funding and Financial Planning the All Needs Planning Way."

Healthcare and Medical Support

The healthcare and medical needs of your special-needs loved one might be extensive or minimal, depending on their specific diagnosis. In either case, accessing the right care and ensuring its funding is crucial. Beyond that, your life plan should:

- Include a comprehensive ongoing medical history and organized documentation related to diagnoses, treatments, and medications.
- Coordinate with healthcare providers to develop a proactive care plan addressing medical needs, preventative care, and emergency protocols.
- Explore community resources and support networks to access specialized services, respite care, and advocacy assistance.

Legal and Guardianship Considerations

Life planning for individuals with special needs also requires careful consideration of various legal issues to protect the individual and the entire family. Your life plan should include a strategy to help you:

- Connect with attorneys specializing in disability law to establish guardianship or power of attorney arrangements, which ensure legal protections and decision-making authority.
- Draft a comprehensive estate plan, including wills, trusts, and healthcare directives, to provide clarity and continuity in managing assets and responsibilities.
- Navigate the various government benefits available to individuals with special needs. Eligibility criteria, application processes, and ongoing compliance with program requirements must be carefully managed to secure benefits like Medicaid, SSI, and Social Security Disability Insurance.
- Consider whether and how a Microboard may fit into your overall plan from a protective and supportive lens.

As discussed, at All Needs Planning, your Master Plan includes a customized Legal Strategy designed to ensure you have the legal protections and decision-making options you need at every stage of your family's journey. We also work with you on an ongoing basis to ensure your strategy is always up-to-date and appropriate for your current needs. For more details on this topic, read our report, "Navigating the Future: Special Needs Estate Planning the All Needs Planning Way".

Social and Recreational Opportunities

Enriching the life of your special-needs loved one involves planning for social and recreational activities. This includes identifying community groups, recreational programs, and social opportunities that cater to his or her interests and abilities. Your special-needs life plan should:

- Foster social connections and peer relationships through participation in community programs, support groups, and recreational activities.
- Identify inclusive recreational opportunities, adaptive sports leagues, and cultural events to promote socialization and personal enrichment.
- Encourage exploration of hobbies, interests, and creative outlets to enhance self-expression and enjoyment of life experiences.

Conclusion

Creating a life plan for a special-needs family requires thoughtful consideration of many factors, including education, finances, healthcare, legal matters, and social integration. At All Needs Planning, our proprietary three-step approach is designed to make it easier for your family to understand and engage in the special needs life planning process with clarity, confidence, and peace of mind!



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