

THE CLEAR PLAN

for Caregivers and Supporters

Calm. Limits. Emergencies. Action. Recovery.

A practical guide for family members, caregivers, and loved ones supporting someone experiencing a mental health challenge, substance use concern, or other crisis.

Calm: Pausing before reacting while recognizing possible safety risks
Limits: Knowing when to set boundaries and offer sustainable support
Emergencies: Recognizing warning signs, responding to crises & creating a plan
Action: Protecting your own well-being during ongoing challenges
Recovery: Restoring balance and learning after a crisis

The **CLEAR** Plan helps individuals prepare for difficult situations by clarifying **boundaries**, identifying **when to step in**, recognizing when **emergency action** is needed, and prioritizing their **own well-being**. Rather than focusing on controlling another person's choices or recovery, it offers a **compassionate framework** for remaining calm, supportive, and grounded while protecting your own health, relationships, and quality of life.

Resilient GEORGIA

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1. Staying CALM When Things Feel Overwhelming

This plan is for me.

It is not my loved one's treatment plan. It does not depend on that person getting better, taking medication, going to treatment, staying sober, working, going to school, or making the choices I wish they would make.

Its purpose is to help me decide in advance how I will respond, what belongs to me, when to step in, when to wait, when to seek professional or emergency help, and how to remain loving, grounded, useful, and still present in my own life.

I can remain connected without being consumed.

Before I do anything, ask: Is this danger, problem, or fear?

1. DANGER



Is there reason to believe someone may be in immediate danger—for example a suicide attempt or imminent risk of self-harm, overdose, severe confusion or psychosis affecting safety, violence, or another medical emergency?

IF YES: For immediate danger or threat to safety, call 911 or seek emergency medical care. For mental health crisis or uncertain safety: Call or text 988, a local crisis service, or seek guidance from a qualified professional.
IF NO: Remind yourself that not every difficult situation is an emergency.

2. A PROBLEM



Something may be wrong without requiring an immediate response. Ask yourself:

- ***What*** *happened?*
- *Does anything need to be addressed* ***today****?*
- *Who is* ***responsible*** *for addressing it?*
- *Is there a helpful and* ***appropriate*** *role for me to play?*

Not every problem requires immediate action, and not every problem is yours to solve.

3. FEAR



Fear can feel just as urgent as a crisis. When safety is not an issue, avoid making major decisions based on anxiety or worst-case scenarios. Before acting, ask:

- *What do I know to be true?*
- *What am I afraid might be true?*

When in doubt, return to the facts, seek guidance if safety is uncertain, and respond with as much clarity as possible.

1. Staying CALM When Things Feel Overwhelming

Things I Know When I Am Thinking Clearly

- I love this person. I cannot control this person. Both are true.
- A diagnosis can explain behavior without making every behavior acceptable.
- Compassion does not require unlimited accommodation.
- I can help without taking responsibility for every outcome.
- Refusing money is not refusing love.
- Another adult's anger does not prove my boundary is wrong.
- Distress is not always danger, but uncertainty about safety deserves attention
- Real danger deserves immediate help; warning signs deserve prompt assessment
- I cannot prevent every bad choice.
- My loved one deserves dignity. So do I.
- The other people I love matter.
- My health matters.
- My relationships matter.
- My future matters.
- Hope does not require prediction.
- A boundary does not mean I have stopped loving.

I do not have to sacrifice my own well-being in order to remain loving.

When it's 2 A.M. and My Mind is Racing

When I am exhausted, overwhelmed, or caught in a spiral of worry, pause and ask:

1. *Is anyone in **immediate** danger or are there **warning signs** that require a professional?*
2. *What do I **know** to be true?*
3. *What belongs to **me**, and what belongs to someone **else**?*
4. *Does anything **truly** need to happen before morning?*

If no safety concern requires action and nothing needs to happen by morning, I give myself permission to rest.

I will put my oxygen mask on first

Worrying does not keep someone safe. When there is no safety concern, rest can help me return to the situation clear-headed and grounded.

2. Knowing Your LIMITS and Setting Boundaries

What Belongs to Me and What Does Not

Mine

I get to decide:

- What help I offer
- What money I provide
- What happens in my home
- What conduct I accept
- When I answer the phone
- When I seek emergency help
- How I treat other people
- How I care for my health

Theirs

Another adult can decide:

- Whether to accept treatment or advice
- Whether to take medication
- Whether to work or attend school
- Whether to use substances
- How to spend money
- What relationships to have
- How they want to live

I can influence another person. *I can encourage.* *I can offer help.*
I cannot control another adult's life.

Supporting someone is not the same as being responsible for every outcome in their life. Adults generally have the right to make their own decisions, even when others disagree. Respecting autonomy does not mean ignoring danger, and serious safety concerns may require professional help. I can acknowledge someone's feelings, listen without judgment, and recognize their distress without agreeing with their choices or accepting responsibility for fixing the problem.

Boundaries I Can Set When I'm Thinking Clearly

Money
I am willing to help with:
I am not willing to help with:
My rule about unrestricted cash:

Calls and Communication
My rule about late-night calls:
I make an exception when:

What I Can Say:

"I care about what happens to you, but I cannot do that. I can help you think about another option."

"I love you and want to help. I am not willing to help in that particular way."

Helpful Tip:
Setting boundaries does not mean you stopped caring. Clear limits can help make support sustainable for everyone. A healthy boundary is not necessarily a permanent boundary. When circumstances change, including a loved one's health, abilities, or safety needs, the support we provide may need to change as well.

Remember: Healthy boundaries do not mean withdrawing support

Some people need substantial, ongoing assistance because of mental illness, disability, or other challenges. Such help may be necessary and an expression of love. The goal is not to provide less assistance, but to consider what is needed, what the caregiver can reasonably provide, and when others can share responsibility.

3. Preparing for EMERGENCIES and Making a Plan

Before I Step In, Ask:

- Was I asked to help or is there a safety concern that requires action?
- What can I do to actually improve this situation?
- Am I doing something the other person can reasonably do?
- Does this meet a genuine need, support their abilities, or will it create a responsibility I cannot reasonably sustain?
- Is someone's life or immediate safety at-risk?

Remember:

- Not every problem is an emergency
- True emergencies deserve a real response
- One person's illness does not define the entire family
- Distress is not always danger, but warning signs should be assessed
- Fear is not the same as a fact, but when uncertain about safety, seek advice
- My well-being matters too

If opioid overdose risk is relevant, I know where the naloxone is, how to use it, and when to call 911.

Choose the Appropriate Response

IMMEDIATE DANGER: **Call 911** or seek emergency medical care for an immediate threat to life or physical safety.

CRISIS OR UNCERTAIN SAFETY: **Call or text 988**, contact a local crisis service, or speak promptly with a qualified clinician. Caregivers may contact 988 about someone else.

DISTRESS WITHOUT URGENT SAFETY CONCERNS: Offer appropriate support, follow established boundaries, and address the concern through ordinary care and follow-up.

What I Can Say to My Loved One:

"I am concerned about your safety. I want to understand what is happening, and I think we should get some additional help."

988 LIFELINE

The 988 Lifeline is available 24/7 for confidential crisis assistance or support from a professional.

3. Preparing for EMERGENCIES and Making a Plan

My Personal Response Plan

Warning signs that mean I should seek immediate or professional help:

My first call, crisis service, treating professional:

I should notify or arrange care for :

Healthy coping and grounding strategies I will use:

Emergency contacts and crisis hotlines: 988 LIFELINE

A Promise to Myself

If I am worried about my loved one's safety, I will not carry that responsibility alone. I will seek guidance from 988, a crisis service, or a qualified professional, use emergency services when necessary, and discuss ways to reduce access to potential means of harm when appropriate.

4. Taking ACTION: Caring for Myself

Warning Signs in Me

- Losing sleep worrying about what might happen
- Canceling personal plans or putting life on hold
- Repeatedly disregarding my own boundaries
- Feeling afraid to say no or maintain healthy limits
- Allowing conversations to be consumed by the person struggling
- Having less time, energy, and attention for other loved ones
- Neglecting my own health, work, interests, or responsibilities
- Believing preventing a crisis depends entirely on me
- Feeling like personal needs, goals, and well-being do not matter

Grounding Strategies

- Take slow, deep breaths
- Name 5 things you can see, 4 you can feel, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.
- Drink a glass of water or tea
- Step outside for fresh air or a walk
- Stretch and move your body
- Place a hand over your heart or on your belly and notice the sensation
- Practice positive affirmations like, "I can handle this moment"
- Journal or write down your worries
- Return to my CLEAR Plan before taking action

My Non-Negotiables

During tough times, I will prioritize:

- My sleep
- My physical health
- My important relationships
- My work or daily responsibilities
- At least one activity that brings me joy or peace

When I Need A Break

If I notice I am becoming exhausted, resentful, or consumed by the situation—and no immediate safety concern requires action—I will:

- Step back when it is safe to do so
- Ask for help and stay connected
- Delay non-urgent decisions until I am calmer
- Prioritize rest and basic self-care
- Limit unnecessary monitoring and checking
- Reconnect with my boundaries and well-being
- Do something that brings me joy or restoration

No matter how my loved one is doing, I intend to keep:

Something for ME

- A friend
- A walk
- A garden
- A class
- A standing lunch
- A trip
- A morning routine

Reminder: Supporting someone else does not require abandoning myself.

5. RECOVERY: Returning to Balance

When Things Are Going Well



Let them go well.

- Let improvement be improvement
- Resist anticipating the next crisis
- Keep healthy boundaries in place
- Reconnect with ordinary life
- Find gratitude in the small moments of joy

Good moments are still real, and they matter.

After a Crisis



When things settle, reflect and ask:

- *What actually happened?*
- *What helped?*
- *What made things worse?*
- *Which boundaries held?*
- *What belongs to my loved one to address?*
- *What belongs to me?*
- *What should be done differently next time*
- *What did this crisis cost me emotionally, physically, financially, or relationally?*
- *What do I need to recover?*
- *What support do I need?*
- *What have I neglected that now needs attention?*

What happened to ME during this crisis?

Acknowledge that I may need time to recover too. Recovery does not always mean returning to life as it was before. Sometimes it means finding a new balance, with different responsibilities, expectations, and sources of support.

Rebuilding Stability



- Restore sleep, routines, work, exercise, and relationships
- Spend time with people and activities outside the crisis
- Re-engage with goals and plans that matter to me
- Resume the parts of my life that were put on hold

Remembering What I Know:

- I cannot control another person
- I can offer necessary, meaningful support without assuming responsibility for every outcome
- My well-being matters too
- I do not have to stay in crisis mode after the crisis has passed

CLEAR Reminders to Carry With You

1. Love without disappearing.
2. Help without taking over.
3. Act when there is danger.
4. Wait when waiting is appropriate.
5. Keep the people you love close.
6. Keep something of your own.

About the CLEAR Plan

The CLEAR Plan is an independent family, caregiver, and supporter preparedness and response tool. Portions of this resource were generated with the assistance of Canva AI in collaboration with **Roland Behm**. All content was edited and refined by Resilient Georgia. It is designed to help loved ones think clearly, set boundaries, prepare for emergencies, respond intentionally, and recover after periods of crisis. It is not a treatment plan, suicide safety plan, clinical protocol, or substitute for professional assessment and care.

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Caregiver Resources

Explore the following trusted organizations for reliable caregiving information, practical tools, and supportive guidance to help you navigate your caregiving journey with confidence.

Resources for Family Caregivers

- Caregiver Action Network: Resources for Family Caregivers: A comprehensive collection of tools, fact sheets, educational materials, and support resources designed to help family caregivers navigate the challenges of caring for a loved one.
- Getting Started: A Guide for New Mental Health Caregivers | Mental Health America: Practical information, helpful tips, and key considerations for supporting a loved one with a mental health condition while maintaining your own well-being.
- Mental Health Resources for Caregivers | Mental Health America: Collection of caregiver tools, educational materials, and support resources covering mental health conditions, treatment, communication, and recovery.
- Resilient Georgia Self-Care Card: A quick-reference tool with practical strategies for managing stress, practicing self-care, and building resilience while supporting others.

Helpful Articles

- Caregiver Self-Check: Questions for Balance and Boundaries: Self-reflection tool to assess your current well-being, identify signs of overwhelm, and explore healthy boundaries that support sustainable caregiving.
- Caregiver Trauma: Why It Happens and What You Can Do About It: Understand how caregiving can affect your emotional health and learn strategies to recognize, address, and recover from caregiver-related stress and trauma.
- Caring for Yourself as a Caregiver: Practical strategies for managing stress, preventing burnout, and maintaining your physical and emotional health.
- Crisis Planning for Caregivers: Prepare for challenging situations with guidance on creating a crisis plan, identifying supports, and knowing what steps to take during a mental health emergency.
- How to Manage the Ups and Downs of Recovery as a Caregiver: Explore how caregivers can navigate setbacks, celebrate progress, and maintain hope during the recovery journey.

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