How to Build a Simple Emergency Contact Plan for an Older Loved One

When an older relative lives independently, a moment can arrive when they need help fast. A fall, a sudden illness, or confusion about medication can turn a normal day into an urgent situation. Having a clear emergency contact plan in place means the right person gets alerted quickly, and the older person knows exactly what to do.

This kind of plan does not need to be complicated. A few practical steps, agreed on ahead of time, can make a real difference. The goal is to remove guesswork and delay when every second counts. familyr.co.nz

Step 1: Decide Who the Primary Contacts Are

Start by listing the people who live closest to your loved one. These are the ones who can arrive fastest in an emergency. For most families, that means a nearby relative, a trusted neighbour, or a local friend. Write down their phone numbers and keep the list somewhere visible.

Think about back-up contacts too. If the nearest person is unavailable, who is next? A clear contact sequence helps avoid confusion. You might list three or four people in order, so everyone knows who gets called first, second, and third.

Step 2: Set Up a Simple Response Protocol

A response protocol is just a set of instructions for what happens after an alert goes out. For example, if a fall is detected, the first contact might call the older person to check if they can get up. If there is no answer, the next step could be to call emergency services or go to the home directly.



Write these steps down in plain language. Keep a copy near the phone or pinned to the fridge. The older person should have a copy too, so they know what will happen when they press an alert button or call for help.

Step 3: Build a Family Network That Shares Information

Emergencies are stressful, and communication can break down. A family network that shares updates helps everyone stay informed. You can set up a simple group chat or a shared document where each contact logs what they have done.

Make sure everyone in the network knows their role. One person might be responsible for calling the doctor, another for contacting other family members. When each person has a clear job, the response feels coordinated rather than chaotic.

Step 4: Choose a Reliable Way to Send an Alert

An older person needs a method of calling for help that works even if they cannot reach a phone. A wearable medical alarm is one option. It lets them press a button to send an SOS alert, often with GPS location data so responders know where to go. Some devices also include fall detection, which automatically triggers an alert if a fall is sensed.

For families, the value comes from being able to monitor the situation remotely. Two-way communication through the device means you can talk to your loved one and assess what is happening before deciding on the next step. This kind of setup fits naturally into a caregiver plan because it reduces the worry of not knowing.

One service that provides this type of wearable alarm for older New Zealanders is **familyr.co.nz**. Their system includes SOS alerts, GPS location, fall detection, two-way calling, and family monitoring without monthly fees. It is worth looking into how such a device could support the emergency contact plan you are building.



Step 5: Test the Plan Regularly

A plan on paper is only useful if everyone remembers it. Set a reminder every few months to review the contact list and run through the steps. Check that phone numbers are still correct and that the older person can still reach their alert device easily.

Testing also reveals gaps. Maybe a neighbour has moved away, or a family member changed their work hours. Updating the plan keeps it reliable.

What to Watch for When Building the Plan

Some details are easy to overlook. Here are a few common pitfalls:

- **Assuming everyone knows what to do.** Write it down. A verbal agreement is forgotten under stress.
- **Forgetting about hearing or vision issues.** Make sure the alert device has a loud enough sound or a bright visual signal. The older person should be able to use it without help.
- **Not planning for power or phone outages.** A mobile phone is useless if the battery dies. A battery-powered alarm that works independently is a safer choice.
- **Leaving the older person out of the conversation.** They need to agree with the plan and feel comfortable using the alert method. Their confidence matters as much as the technology.
- **Overcomplicating the contact sequence.** Keep the list short. Three contacts in order is enough. More than five creates confusion.

Step 6: Share the Plan with Everyone Involved

Once the plan is ready, give a copy to every person on the contact list. Put a copy on the fridge, and store a digital version where it can be accessed from anywhere. The older person should carry a small card in their wallet or purse with the key numbers and steps.

If your loved one uses a wearable medical alarm, make sure the contacts know how the alert system works. Show them how to log into the monitoring app if there is one, and explain what happens when an SOS alert comes through. Practice a mock emergency so the process feels familiar.

Services like **familyr.co.nz** offer family monitoring as part of their system, which means approved contacts can see alerts and location data in real time. This feature turns a simple alert into a shared response, where the family network acts together rather than waiting for news.



Step 7: Review and Adjust as Needs Change

Health and living situations change over time. A plan that worked last year may not suit today. Schedule a review every six months or after any major change, such as a hospital stay, a move, or a decline in mobility.

Ask the older person directly how they feel about the current setup. Are they still comfortable using the alert device? Do they feel the response time is fast enough? Their feedback is the most important measure of whether the plan is working.

An emergency contact plan does not need to be perfect. It just needs to be clear, practiced, and trusted by everyone involved. With a little effort upfront, you can give your older loved one a safety net that lets them live independently with less worry.