

The Five D's You Need To Know To Be Self-Reliant

We all tend to think difficult things will happen to someone else rather than us. Life seems to be full of a variety of challenges. I've been thinking about some situations with family and friends that remind me that life is fragile and uncertain. If you think about it, there are at least five events that the majority of life's troubles fall under; disaster, disability, disease, divorce, and death. I'm sure you can think of some others, but I think most life changing events could fall under one of these categories. Some of these events we bring on ourselves because of our individual lifestyle or risk taking activities, but many come at us with no warning and due to no fault or input on our part.

Lets outline some situations to help illustrate why each one of us needs to be prepared for the unexpected, but also to remind us that some activities or life decisions can have consequences that are difficult to deal with and/or overcome.

The Five D's To Be Self-Reliant:

Disaster: We have some friends who moved to South Carolina some time ago. We were concerned about them when we saw the significant flooding that took place in that state recently. When we contacted them they informed us that their home was safe from the flooding, but a large area and thousands of homes and businesses were dark due to the floods knocking down power poles and submerging power sub-stations. They were having to deal with cool weather without a furnace, a dark house with no TV, internet, limited ability to communicate with the outside world, no way to cook meals on their electric stove, etc. They had no idea how long the power was going to be out and communication was limited to cell service, as long as they could charge their phones. A similar situation happened right here in Willard, due to extremely high winds that brought power lines down when trees were uprooted. Many residents were without power for a number of days.

Suggestions to be self-reliant: Families would be wise to store extra food and water, have blankets and layered clothing to stay warm, have alternate cooking options like BBQ's, Sun Ovens, butane stoves, etc. with several containers of fuel and backup lighting sources like multiple flashlights, solar powered lights, lanterns, extra candles, and more.

Disability: A few years ago a good friend severely damaged his back when he fell down some stairs when helping a family member move some furniture. Several surgeries and rehabs later he is still suffering from pain and some immobility. He has been unable to work full-time period as he deals with the medical procedures and the time it takes to heal sufficiently to resume some semblance of "normal" activity. Thank goodness he has good insurance, a loving spouse, and other family members who can manage the household duties while providing caregiver support. He is also blessed with a supportive employer who is willing to work around his visits to doctors and the time needed to get necessary rest. Even with these advantages this situation has put pressure on family finances and affected the peace of mind for all concerned. He is well on his way to recovery and thank goodness he can still work.

Another friend was hurt in an accident when he was about 46 years old during a fun day's outing many years ago which caused him to spend years as a quadriplegic in a wheelchair. This unexpected accident caused him to give up his vocation, prompted years of care giving by loving family members, and the related health and medical issues eventually caused his death.

Suggestions to be self-reliant: Although we all want to provide service and help to those around us, we need to take extra caution when activities can prompt undue risk to life and limb. Situations like these are a good reminder to check up on our health insurance, sick leave, savings for a “rainy day” and other resources that take pre-planning and possibly some sacrifices to purchase and put in place.

Disease: My husband likes to read the newspaper every day as he tries to stay well informed about local, national and world events. While reading, he also checks out the daily obituaries thinking he may notice the name of someone he knows. He often comments about how many of the people who have passed away died as a result of cancer. I marvel that with all the resources available the world still struggles with this terrible disease. Cancer takes many different forms with diverse consequences. Today I look like someone with leprosy due to a recent visit to the dermatologist to get some “pre-cancers” treated with liquid nitrogen. I wish all cancers could be treated so easily. My Mom and Mother-In-Law have had cancer. Both tried to live healthy lives with proper eating habits and efforts to shy away from things that we’ve been told can possibly cause cancer. Of course, there are many other diseases that can affect your quality of life, family finances and the ability to do everyday things, many that aren’t life threatening. We also recognize that many of us get diseases without knowing the how let alone the why. The best we can do is try to minimize the risk of contagion.

Suggestions to be self-reliant: Always wash your hands often, stay clear of individuals who are sick, stay indoors and take care of yourself when you get sick, eat healthy, try to get some exercise every day if current health permits, get regular checkups as suggested by your doctor or other health advisors. Keep your health insurance premiums paid timely, consider cancer insurance, protect yourself from prolonged exposure to the sun, if you are using prescription drugs be sure to take the dosages as directed, have some money set aside in case you find yourself unable to work for an extended period, have your kids get suggested shots, and don’t forget to have your booster shots when timely.

Divorce: We all know people who have gone through the challenges of divorce. Divorce is difficult for all concerned, even in the best of circumstances. When we go through the joys of dating, get married, and in some cases have children, none of us picture the marriage coming to an end through divorce. Certainly, there are situations when divorce is the best course of action, but the scars and new challenges it brings may have life changing influences on the spouses and children. The emotional damage from the legal steps, separation, and sharing of child rearing can be daunting. Of significant consideration are the stresses that come from the new financial conditions most couples find themselves. Now there are two places to live with the related costs of rent or house payments, utilities, upkeep and more. Generally, support from one spouse to the other doesn’t cover all monthly expenses, prompting both spouses to find work, often when one didn’t work prior to the divorce. It may be that both spouses got a significant education, training, and work experience prior to marriage, but all too often that isn’t the case as the new couple desires to not only get married but also are anxious to start a family. Blended families can sometimes bring on additional challenges. Many amicable divorces work very well.

Suggestions to be self-reliant: Prepare for marriage by getting some advanced education or vocational training. As with the other topics above, being self-reliant means being able to care for yourself during the different phases of life. Career training adds that important aspect of being able

to earn sufficient funds to cover life's expenses. Waiting for a while and dating for an extended period also can provide the time necessary to really know each other and recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship. Couples should also set aside funds for savings every month, not with the intention of paying for the divorce and its aftermath, but as a means of additional financial security for any unexpected situation that may come along. That also goes for setting aside funds for your children's future school plans, whether college or vocational school. Consider approaching your in-laws and suggesting they contribute to a tax beneficial student savings plan.

Death: There may be no more devastating event in a family than an unexpected death of a spouse or child. The event often comes with other stresses like medical expenses, the cost of the funeral and burial. Other issues arise from loss of job due to health issues that ultimately cause the death, being left to raise children as a single parent, having to go back to work to support the family, possibly having to move to smaller quarters since there are insufficient funds to cover expenses and more. There are possibly other expenses that we don't always think about, such as a replacement vehicle if the death was due to an auto accident, not having a will or trust in place, not having a burial plan in place, not being aware of or know how to take care of things the spouse tended to be responsible for like paying bills, doing the yard work or fixing meals, etc. If the dead spouse was the breadwinner they also more than likely provided for health insurance through their employment.

Please be aware of ALL your monthly or quarterly bills. You need to know what they are NOW before you lose your spouse or partner. I have seen so many situations where one spouse had no idea where their mortgage was paid. The one credit card was ONLY in the spouse's name. After the death, the spouse could not use the card to rent a car or buy a plane ticket. Now the spouse doesn't qualify to even get a credit card. I have seen where the spouse didn't even know where they had money in the bank. There must be a joint ownership situation in case of a death. This is a critical situation for the entire family.

Suggestions to be self-reliant: As with the other topics above, consider taking stock of your situation now, and think what could be done to better prepare for life without the spouse, for whatever reason. Should you consider getting some new education or training. Look over your finances and evaluate things you could start doing NOW that would provide the ability to save more each month, just in case. That could include reducing the money spent on non-essentials like eating out, less expensive transportation, cutting back on trips or expensive clothes, all with the goal to save for the unexpected.