
Managing Your Stress



Have you ever felt overwhelmed by the time and effort you put into raising your grandchildren? When you're caring for children, it may seem like there are not enough hours in the day. Because you are spending so much time taking care of others, you may have less time to do things you enjoy. But it's important to take care of yourself so that you have the energy you need to care for your grandchildren.

Here are some ideas for how to take care of yourself by managing your time wisely, using relaxation and exercise, taking time-outs to regroup, and joining a support group.

Managing Time

When your grandchildren move in, your schedule may be upended. Schedules and routines can help you manage your time more effectively. Time management has many payoffs, including increased satisfaction, more relaxation, and much less stress. Changing your habits to use time more effectively requires self-discipline. The first step in effective time management is to be honest with yourself and identify challenges.



The following are some tips to improve your time management:

Set limits on “time-wasting” activities. Phone calls, texting, social media, and watching television can be useful in small doses, but it’s easy to spend too much time on these activities. Decide how much time you are willing to devote to these activities each day and turn off the devices when your time is up. You also may want to designate times when these activities are off-limits for the whole family, such as mealtimes or right before bedtime.

Create a plan or schedule for the day or week. Schedules can help you see everything you want to accomplish. Set priorities according to what needs to be accomplished in a day, a week, or a month. Break bigger jobs into many little tasks.

Use a to-do list. Write down the things you plan to do during the day. Prioritize the list. Start with the most important item on your list. Stay with it until you have finished, and then cross it off your list before moving on. This will give you a sense of accomplishment as you complete the most important tasks. If something unexpected comes up (as it often does), review your priorities and decide where it fits.

Involve your grandchildren. You don’t need to do everything yourself. Give some of the tasks to your grandchildren. Even young children can help set the table. Older children can fold laundry, take out the trash, and help cook dinner. When delegating, be certain to tell your grandchildren what you want done, how to do it, and when they should finish. When grandchildren help with daily tasks, they learn that living together requires working together.

Use your prime time wisely. What time of day are you at your highest energy level? Some people are at their best in the morning. Others do their best work at night. Use your highest-energy time for jobs requiring the most attention and effort.

Learn to say no. This allows you to exercise control over your life. Choose the activities that are most meaningful to you and devote your time to them. Don’t feel obligated to do something

just because someone asks.

Practice the barter system. Swap jobs with family members, friends, or neighbors.

Multitask appropriately. Identify small tasks you can do with someone else, such as unloading the dishwasher while talking on the phone. Ask your grandchildren to help you wash the dishes, making it a time you spend together.

Use waiting time. Keep a list of 5- or 10-min tasks that can be done while you wait for others. You might pay bills online while waiting to pick up grandchildren, or make a to-do list during practices.

Clean the clutter. Throw away unnecessary papers, sell or give away unused items, and have a place for everything. This will help you feel organized and ready to get things done.

Avoid common time-wasters. These include worrying about something you cannot control, not communicating effectively, complaining about things, being defensive or critical when others try to help, and being inflexible or rigid in how you do things.

Try planning backward. Begin with the end of a sequence of events. When planning for the next morning, you might need to be at a 9 a.m. meeting. Plan this way: It takes 15 min to get there, so I must leave by 8:45. I must be dressed by 8:30. I need to be finished eating by 8:15, so I need to have breakfast served by 7:45. This means I need to be preparing breakfast by 7:15.

Reducing Stress through Relaxation and Exercise



Relaxation and exercise are good ways to reduce your stress and maintain good health. Set aside 15 min of quiet time to relax each day. Play some soothing music. Close your eyes and take deep breaths, and reflect on all the good things in your life.

Regular exercise, such as walking three times a week for at least 20 min, also can help to reduce stress. Taking time for relaxation and exercise can give you the energy needed to continue taking care of your family. Your grandchildren also will learn from your positive example. Seeing you take care of yourself will help them to accept and value themselves.

Taking Time for Yourself

As a grandparent raising children, it is normal to feel stress related to parenting. When you notice this stress, build in some time to do something you enjoy. Find someone else to care of the children. Find a hobby you enjoy like gardening, swimming, or photography. Take a hot bath, read a book, or just enjoy the quiet.

Support Groups Can Help Grandparents Connect and Manage Stress

Support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren can help grandparents cope with the stresses of parenting again. Grandparent support groups can function as “extended families.” They give you a chance to share your feelings, solve problems, and feel connected to other grandparents. Support groups offer emotional support and advice on dealing with common problems. Members can talk about their problems without embarrassment, support and encourage each other, share coping strategies, release negative feelings, make new friends, and feel less isolated. Just knowing that other people share your feelings can help you cope with the challenges of full-time grandparenting.

You also can reach out to your support group for specific information about raising grandchildren. Many support groups talk about issues like Medicaid benefits for your grandchildren, community programs that can help you and your grandchildren, and attorneys and social workers who can help you with custody issues. A support group’s purpose is to show you that you are not alone—there are others like you.

Finding or Starting a Support Group

There are many ways to find support groups. If you know other grandparents raising grandchildren, ask them if they know of support groups. Search online, or ask for recommendations on social media. Consider asking local therapists, social workers, and other helping professionals if they know of existing support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren.

If you cannot find an existing support group, consider starting one as a source of support for yourself and other grandparents like you. Here are some tips to get a support group started:

Contact other grandparents raising grandchildren. Social workers at hospitals, people working in the juvenile court system, faith communities, family resource centers, word of mouth, and social media connections are excellent ways of finding potential members. Prepare a letter or a flyer with your name, phone number, and other pertinent information. Post the flyers in schools, grocery stores, pediatrician’s offices, churches, or any place grandparents might be, and share it on social media if appropriate.

Select a meeting place. Find a meeting place that will be accessible to as many grandparents as possible. If child care will be made available, have a separate room available. County Extension offices, schools, churches, hospitals, a YMCA/YWCA community center, or your local library may have a meeting room that you can use for little or no cost. You also could consider a virtual support group using a video conferencing program if distance is an issue. Just be sure potential members have access to technology and know how to use it if you plan to meet virtually.

Announce the first meeting. When you have a list of potential members and a meeting place, contact the grandparents to let them know when and where the meeting will be. Phone calls, texts, or other personal contacts are most likely to keep grandparents interested in attending.

Hold the first meeting. The first meeting should be a time of fellowship, planning and getting acquainted. It is nice, but not necessary, to serve refreshments. Group members could agree to bring food or drinks to share or take turns providing refreshments.

Set ground rules. Inform the group that everything shared during meetings will remain confidential. Nobody is required to share private details or feelings. The purpose of the group is to offer support to each other. Review these ground rules at each meeting and revise them as needed.

Give everyone chances to participate. It is important that everyone feel included. Share positive as well as negative experiences. Be sure to spend at least as much time listening as talking. Invite, but don't pressure, individuals to talk. Remember that some people are not as outgoing as others. Quieter members may hesitate to share until they feel accepted and safe.

Keep it short. A typical support group meeting lasts between 1 and 2 hr. Have the group decide on the time and place of the next meeting, the topic and format, and if they want a speaker. Remember, you can't please everyone all the time.

Choose topics for future meetings. Encourage the group to talk about the format and discussion topics for future meetings. Find out what is important for the grandparents in your particular group. Some popular topics for grandparent support groups include legal issues, such as custody; financial benefits, such as food stamps and social security; medical resources, such as Medicaid; disciplining your grandchildren; raising teenagers; dealing with the school system; and other parenting issues.

In Summary

Being a full-time custodial grandparent can be stressful. When you handle that stress by managing your time, taking time for yourself, and getting the support you need, you will be better equipped to care for your grandchildren.

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