

# Grandparents

## Raising Grandchildren:

### Caring for Yourself



**H**ave you ever felt like no one appreciates the time you put into your grandchildren? When you're caring for children, it may seem like there are not enough hours in the day. You may spend most of your time taking care of others and have little time for the things you enjoy. But it's important to take time out for you. Here are some ideas on 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 Your Time

Time cannot be saved; it can only be used. Becoming an efficient time user has many pay-offs, including increased satisfaction, more relaxation, and much less stress. Your habits affect your use of time. Changing habits in order to use time more effectively requires self-discipline. The first step is to be honest with yourself and begin to identify some problem areas.

To use time wisely, you have to control time wasters. Only through self-discipline will you have the time to do the things that are important to you. Here are some things you can do now to become a more effective time user:

- **Establish a plan to help you see all of the things you want to accomplish.** Set priorities according to what needs to be accomplished within that day, week, or month. Break the job 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 before moving on to the next item. This will give you a sense of accomplishment because you are now completing the tasks that are most important to you. If something unexpected comes up, look at your priorities and decide where it fits.

- **Use your prime time.** 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 prime time for jobs requiring the most attention and effort.

- **Try delegating tasks.** 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 they should do it, and when they should finish.

Children learn a lot by helping you with daily tasks. They learn that living together requires working together. Their self-esteem increases, and they become more responsible when they have chances to help out at home. Children learn to be responsible when those who care for them set a good example. Expect your grandchildren to give as well as receive. Show them how to do things for themselves, and remember that most children are capable

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of taking on more responsibility than they are given.

- **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** by swapping jobs with family members or others.

- **Do two things at once.** Identify small tasks you can do with someone else, such as unloading the dishwasher while talking on the phone. Or have the grandchildren help you wash the dishes, making it a time you spend together.

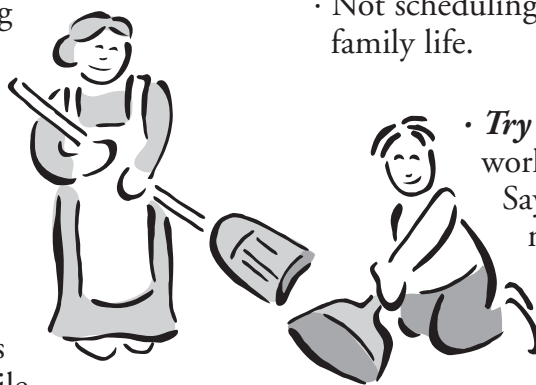
- **Use your waiting time.** Keep a list of five- or ten-minute tasks that can be done while you wait for others. You might balance the check-book while waiting to pick up grandchildren, or make a to-do list during practices.

- **Clean the clutter.** Create a comfortable work area. 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.

- **Eliminate any once-useful habits** that are now first-class time wasters. You don't have to accomplish something every minute of the day, but using time poorly means leaving some work unfinished, which can be frustrating. Here is a list of common time-wasters. Do you recognize any?

- Worrying about something you have no control over, such as things that happened yesterday.

- Not communicating effectively. (People have to know what you want them to do in order to be able to do it).
- Being negative, defensive, critical, or petty.
- Being inflexible or rigid in the way you do things.
- Not taking time for self-renewal.
- Not scheduling time for healthy, enjoyable family life.



- **Try planning backwards.** It may work better than planning ahead. Say you must be at an 8 p.m. meeting. Plan this way: It takes 15 minutes to get there, so I must leave by 7:45. I must change clothes by 7:30. I need to be finished eating by 7:15 and must be preparing dinner by 6:30. That kind of backward thinking really works!

### Relaxation and Exercise

Relaxation and exercise are two good ways to reduce your physical tension and maintain good health. Relaxation only requires a quiet place and a comfortable position. Find a regular time to relax. Play some soothing music. Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Think about all the good things in your life. Even 10 minutes will help. Regular exercise, such as walking three times a week for at least 20 minutes, can also help to reduce tension, increase your energy, and improve your health. Encourage your grandchildren to walk with you, go swimming, or bicycle riding together.

### Taking Time For Yourself

As a grandparent raising grandchildren, it is normal to sometimes resent the changes in your life that parenting causes. When you begin to feel stress, it is time to take a “time-out”. Set aside time to do something you enjoy. Find someone else to care for the

children. Find a hobby you enjoy like gardening, swimming, or photography. Make a list of what you like best about yourself. Celebrate small victories with things you enjoy, like a hot bath or a few minutes to read a favorite book. Taking time for yourself will give you the energy needed to continue taking care of your family. Your grandchildren can learn from your positive example. Seeing you take care of yourself will help them to accept and value themselves as well.

### Support Groups Can Ease the Journey

In the past decade, support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren have sprung up as a way to help many grandparents cope with the stress of parenting. Grandparent support groups function as “extended families.” They give grandparents a chance to share their feelings, solve problems, and feel connected to other grandparents.

Groups offer emotional support and advice on dealing with common problems. Members can talk about their problems without embarrassment, give support and encouragement to each other, share coping strategies, release feelings such as anger and guilt, make new friends, and help deal with feelings of social isolation. Just knowing that other people share your feelings can help you cope with the challenges of grandparenting.

Members of a support group can also be a source of information for you. 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 obtain legal custody. A support group’s purpose is to say, “You are not alone—there are others like you.”



### How to Start a Support Group

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

• **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 for the children. 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.

When you have a list of potential members and a meeting place, contact the grandparents by phone or in person to decide when to have the first meeting. Once a date and time are chosen, let each person know when and where the meeting will be. A personal reminder helps keep interest high.

• **Hold the 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.

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.

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Try to keep the length of meetings between one and two hours. 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.

• ***Give Everyone Chances to Participate.*** It is important that everyone participate. Members of a group benefit from each other's experiences. Share positive as well as negative experiences. Some people are not as verbal as others. Quieter members may hesitate to share until they feel accepted and safe. Be sure to spend at least as much time listening as talking.

• ***Choose Topics for Future Meetings.*** Group topics should be chosen by the group. 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; grandparent-related laws that are either on the books or pending; financial benefits, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Social Security; medical resources, such as Medicaid; discipline at home; dealing with the school system; and other parenting issues.

### **In Summary**

Taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of other people. When you take time out for yourself and get the support you need, you can do a better job of taking care of your grandchildren. When you may feel underappreciated, you know it is time to spend some time caring for yourself. Managing your time, using relaxation and exercise, and participating in a support group can help you recharge your batteries. These simple tasks can help you feel ready to face the challenge of parenting your grandchildren.

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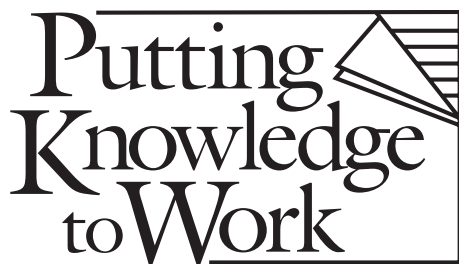
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