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www.childcareinfo.org

Managing Stress: Caring for your Grandchildren and Yourself

Being a grandparent can be a joyful and fulfilling experience. However, if you are the full time caregiver and guardian for your grandchild, as are about 2.4 million grandparents across the United States, providing such care can also become stressful (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Stress can include feelings of pressure or anxiety. While some stress is a normal part of each person's life, stress can also become unhealthy when it is not managed appropriately.

When caring for yourself and your grandchild, there are many changes that may occur. In addition to providing food and shelter, there are emotional concerns with financial and educational responsibilities. As such, managing your stress is an important part of meeting the demands of caring for your grandchild. It is essential that you are able to recognize the signs of stress and learn appropriate ways to respond to it. Some signs of stress include:

- Continuous rapid heartbeats and high blood pressure
- Decreased concentration or energy
- Difficulty sleeping
- Increased nervousness
- Increased lack of patience
- Mood swings
- Physical pains (back or neck aches)
- Weight loss or gain



These responses may be caused by emotional changes as well as the environment. They may stem from family issues, conflict with others, and the lack of resources to handle problems.

Keep in mind that your grandchildren benefit most from having a caregiver who is healthy and happy. Here are some tips on taking care of yourself in order to better care for your grandchildren:

- **Ask for help-** Local programs through churches, schools, and other organizations in your community can provide helpful services. For example, grandparent groups provide opportunities to receive support and share your experience with others. Call 2-1-1 Infoline for a list of resources for grandparents raising grandchildren.
- **Be positive and have fun-** Be sure to take time out of your busy schedule to participate in an activity that you enjoy. A good attitude will help to improve the way you feel and help you to be more productive throughout the day. Check local recreation departments for events for older adults. 2-1-1 Infoline will also be able to help you find local recreation programs.
- **Be realistic-** Do what you can today, but accept that certain things may be left for tomorrow. Be organized and do not try to tackle everything at once. For example, schedule grocery shopping, doctor appointments, and parent-teacher meetings on different days, if possible.
- **Build on your strengths-** Are you a good listener? Are you patient and organized? Knowing yourself is important as you model valuable skills for your grandchild.
- **Eat and rest well-** Make sure to get enough sleep each night, and take quick naps during the day if necessary. A good night's sleep of about 8 hours is suggested as well as 3 balanced meals each day to provide valuable nutrition and energy.

- **Get some exercise!**- Performing physical activity such as a quick twenty minute walk outdoors or through the mall (with your doctor's approval) with or without your grandchildren, is a good way to maintain a healthy body.
- **Keep a sense of humor**- Make family time fun by encouraging laughter and allowing yourself to be flexible.
- **Monitor health**- Schedule regular checkups and health visits. Be sure to take medications as directed, and talk to your primary doctor or your grandchild's school nurse or pediatrician about any physical or emotional concerns for yourself or grandchild.
- **Take time for yourself**- Take a break from the daily routines. Try to have a back up person that can come and give you some relief, or look into finding a local babysitter. A few hours to yourself each week doing your favorite activities (i.e. bike riding, reading, knitting, or keeping a journal) may help you recharge and get back on track. Be sure to include breaks each day and be aware of what triggers your stress.
- **Talk about it!**- Communicate with your grandchild. This will help them know what to expect, while also developing a trusting and supportive relationship with you. Also, involve family members and friends who are also available to provide needed support.

Raising grandchildren is a stressful and tiring job. It can make you feel overwhelmed, joyful, depressed, inspired, guilty and content all at the same time. **Don't give up!** Take good care of yourself so you can successfully care for your grandchildren.

Being aware of these tips will help improve the quality of your life and the time shared with your grandchildren.

To learn of programs in your community that support grandparents raising grandchildren, contact 2-1-1.