



Raising Children as a Grandparent and Primary Caregiver

If you are faced with becoming a primary caregiver to your grandchildren, you might feel both hopeful and uneasy. No matter how much you love your grandkids, raising them can come with some challenges.

Recognize your feelings. It is important to recognize and accept what you are feeling, both positive and negative. It is normal to feel uncertain about raising children again when it might be a time where your responsibilities are fewer than before.

Take care of yourself. A healthy you means healthy grandchildren. It is important to eat healthy meals, exercise regularly and get enough sleep. Do not let doctor's appointments or medication refills slide.

Take time for rest to avoid burnout. Use your "me time" to nurture yourself and choose activities that help the relaxation response, such as deep breathing, yoga or meditation.

Support makes all the difference. Find someone you can talk to about what you are going through. This will give you a chance to work through your feelings and reach an acceptance of the situation.

Look for support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren. Even phone support can be helpful in this journey, and it is a good start for making friends in similar situations.

Realize your grandkids will have mixed feelings too. Your grandkids may resent being separated from their parents and wish to return, even if their home situation was dangerous or abusive. Do not take this personally. Your grandkids' feelings may come out in many ways, including behavior. No matter their behavior, your grandkids need your comfort and support. Remember that children often act out in a safe place.

Focus on creating a stable environment. Establish a routine. Set clear, age-appropriate house rules and enforce them consistently. Make sure that each grandchild has a private space and offer your time and attention.

Encourage open and honest communication. It is especially important to take the time to listen to your grandkids. In this tough time, they need an adult they can go to with their questions, concerns and feelings. Plan regular times when you sit and talk to each other, free from TV, phones, games and other distractions. Encourage your grandchildren to talk about their feelings, both good and bad. Try to listen without judging or dismissing their feelings.

It is okay to say, "I don't know." You do not have to have an answer for everything. If you do not know when their parent(s) are coming home, for example, be honest about it. Do not evade the question or lie.

Access grandfamilies.org/state-fact-sheets to find support in your area.

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