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Raising Grandchildren? Take Care of Yourself Too!

If you're a grandparent caring for a child, here's how to find the help you need

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Raising grandchildren can be a tremendous challenge. Grandparent caregivers need to develop a support system to help them with the many tasks at hand. It's also important for grandparents to take good care of themselves so they can stay mentally and physically healthy enough to do the job.

One way to make the task easier is to connect with other grandparents in the same situation. There are many grandparent support groups located all over the country. Find one in your area by searching our Grandparent Support Locator or your state's GrandFacts fact sheet at www.grandfactsheets.org.

Grandfamilies Guide

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Many relative caregivers connect with others via internet online groups, such as our Raising Grandchildren group at www.aarp.org/online-community.

If you are unable to find a group in your area, you might consider starting one yourself. Ask a local agency to sponsor your support group and help you find

community resources and speakers. Try your Area Agency on Aging, child welfare office, county extension service, faith-based organization or other human services agency for help getting a group started.

In the meantime, here are answers to your questions about finding support:

How can I get other people to help me out?

As you take on the task of caring for grandchildren, your friends and family will probably want to help. But they may not be sure of what they can do. It's up to you to:

- **Ask for help.** Make a list of small and large ways family and friends can support you. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. It shows that you are going to do your best in raising your grandchild and you know what it will take to get that done.
- **Have a family conference or meeting** of close and extended family members. Discuss how your life, your grandchild's life and other family members' lives will change.
- **Try to divide up tasks and responsibilities** for other areas of your life, such as caring for older parents, so you can have the time and energy for raising children again. A small amount of planning can save you some big headaches later.
- **Talk with your friends about how your social life will change.** Let them know you'd still like to see them, but you might need help with babysitting.

How do I find support services in my neighborhood?

You probably will be able to find services and support for you and/or your grandchildren in your community. Start by checking out these resources:

- Schools. Talk to the social worker at your grandchild's school about what kind of help might be available
- Children's Services, Children and Families or Child Welfare Office. Call your town or county government offices to find out what kind of help you may be eligible for
- Faith-based organizations (religious organizations often have programs to help families even if they are not members of their faith)

- Community Centers
- YMCA and YWCA
- County Extension Offices
- Boys and Girls Clubs, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and other youth groups
- Mentoring programs, like Big Brothers and Big Sisters
- Local colleges and universities (for example, they may have free legal clinics in their law schools, or might have student who can work with your grandchildren)

Can I find someone to watch my grandkids?

Many communities have programs that will provide care for your grandchild while you do things like go to a doctor, go shopping, go to court or simply get some much-needed rest.

Check with your Area Agency on Aging or child welfare office to find out if there are relative caregiver respite programs in your state. You should also:

- Locate your state's GrandFacts fact sheet at www.grandfactsheets.org to find out what resources are available.
- Check out any "Morning Out" programs or drop-in child-care centers that may be available in your community.
- Ask about before- and after-school programs at your grandchild's school
- Line up babysitters, such as local teenagers or your friends/family
- Trade care with other grandparent caregivers — you watch their kids one week and they watch yours the next week
- Check out mentoring programs for your grandchildren, such as the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, after-school programs and Boys and Girls Clubs.

How can I get help if I'm feeling overwhelmed?

When you are raising grandchildren, you may feel overcome with emotions. You may feel grief, sadness, and a sense of loss and disappointment that your child wasn't able to raise his/her children. Or you may feel angry or resentful about having to take on this role. If your feelings are getting in the way of your day-to-day life, it can be helpful to talk to a mental health professional. Ask friends, family or your doctor for names of a therapist, counselor or social worker who does counseling. Or call your local department of mental health for a referral. Remember, by taking care of your own mental health needs you will be better able to care for your grandchildren.

----- Written by Amy Goyer, AARP

AARP was founded in 1958 and has over 38 million members. It is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization for people over the age of 50. AARP is well-known for its advocacy efforts, providing its members with important information, products and services that enhance quality of life as they age. They also promote community service and keep members and the public informed on issues relating to the over 50 age group.

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