

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Are you a grandparent who has given up your retirement or your own plans in order to take on the diapers, daycare, teacher conferences, driver's ed, and everything else that comes along with raising children? Many grandparents today are stepping in to raise their grandchildren when the children's own parents are not able or willing to do so. In fact, the U.S. Census of 2000 found that over 2.4 million grandparents have responsibility for their grandchildren.

If you are one of these grandparents, you have made numerous sacrifices in order to provide a better life for your grandchildren. What are some things you can do now to provide the best possible care for your grandchildren while still preserving your own health and well-being?

Making the adjustment. Often, grandparents take on this obligation when the grandchildren's own parents abandon them or when the children can no longer live with them because of the parent's mental disorder, substance abuse, or incarceration. Thus, you may have the added burden of caring for children who suffered from abuse or neglect from their own parents. These children may feel insecure and afraid; they may be angry at their situation and even embarrassed by it. It will take time for these children to feel safe and secure. You can encourage these good feelings and ease their adjustment to their new home in a number of ways:

- 👂 Set up a daily routine of mealtimes, bedtime, and other activities so that the children have some predictability in their lives.
- 👂 Help your grandchildren to feel that they are "home" by making room for them and their belongings. Your home needs to be welcoming, safe, and child-friendly.
- 👂 Work on communication skills. Talk to your grandchildren, and make sure that the children know that they can always talk to you.
- 👂 Practice positive discipline that emphasizes education, not punishment, and that rewards good behavior with praise.
- 👂 Set up a few rules, and explain the rules to the children. Then, enforce them consistently.

Finding shared activities. Building new relationships can be difficult. Sometimes, it helps to find things that you can do with your grandchildren to nurture your relationship and to make them feel secure and happy in their new home.

- 👂 Read. Children love to hear stories, and even older children may surprise you by sitting quietly as you read aloud. Children who see you read have a better chance of becoming readers themselves.
- 👂 Get computer savvy. If you don't have your own computer, use the one at the public library. The library may have classes or other free help for you. You'll find lots of things that you and your grandchildren can do on the computer, from games to school research.
- 👂 Join a group. There are many local support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren, and a number of these groups also provide activities for the children. You might also find welcoming groups at your place of worship or in the local schools or library.
- 👂 Take up a sport or other outdoor activity. Children of all ages need to be active. Physical activity may help your grandchildren feel better and develop a healthy lifestyle, and it can be an important stress reliever for you.

