

TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Caring for your grandchildren, or other relative, can be a rewarding but stressful experience. You may feel there is no time to take care of yourself. The demands of caring for children again seem to require all your time and energy. You may have put your own needs at the bottom of the list while working to meet the needs of others, but the old saying, “you can’t care for someone else until you care for yourself” really is true.

Setting aside personal time and taking care of yourself are important for emotional and physical well-being when raising children. When you take care of yourself, you are not being selfish, but are helping yourself to take better care for those who depend on you. Neglecting your own physical or emotional health can lead to stress or burnout and even serious health issues.

Taking care of yourself includes:

Caring for your physical well-being, by eating a nutritious diet, exercising regularly, and getting enough sleep. It is important to maintain your physical health so you will have the energy needed to care for your family. It also means you should not put off your own doctor’s appointments and check-ups. Try your best to see your health care provider regularly. If it is hard to find time to fit in an appointment, try scheduling one on the same day as your children. If scheduled appropriately, you could make back-to-back appointments with the same provider to get the check-up you need. Also, be sure to ask your doctor for recommendations on preventive health care, such as screenings and immunizations.

Maintaining a social network and continuing friendships may be difficult when you are raising children again, but you will benefit from those social contacts and the support they provide. Make an effort to maintain relationships that are important to you. Having someone to talk to can be very helpful when you are feeling stressed.

Connecting with other grandfamilies who understand your feelings can be very beneficial to your entire family. Group meetings and peer support networks (like Maine Kids-Kin’s Grandfamily to Grandfamily) offer you a safe environment to share your story, your feelings and concerns. You can also learn about solutions, resources and coping strategies from others who have gone through similar experiences. Many group meetings also provide free, onsite childcare. If you feel uncomfortable sharing your story with others ‘in person,’ consider looking for an online support group. *(If you are interested in connecting with other grandfamilies in Maine online, contact Janelle at Maine Kids-Kin.)*

Taking time for relaxation and leisure may be difficult for many grandfamilies. It may seem like a low priority when there are so many demands on your time. But it is important for your well-being and stress management. Spending just a few minutes a day doing something you enjoy can refresh you. One quick way to reduce stress at any time, is to take three deep breaths. You will be surprised how well it works! To read about more proven stress relievers, view our tip sheet at www.mainekids-kin.org/tipsheets.html

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