

FAMILY AT LARGE: ROCKING THE MARRIAGE BOAT

The sudden changes to your lifestyle when you take in children to raise and care for, often has a ripple effect in your relationship with your partner. Many people experience strain in their relationships when they are under stress and have additional responsibilities.

Common Areas of Stress in Grandfamily Marriages

While there are plenty of opportunities for disagreement between us and our spouse or significant other, here are some of the most common for grandfamilies:

- Differences of opinion over whether we should be a grandfamily.
- Disagreements over house rules, and the child's behavior or discipline.
- Disagreements about how to manage the children's parents.
- Added expenses cause financial strain and raise new questions about how to spend money and how to set priorities.
- The emotional and physical energy required to parent children leaves less time to spend with each other or to nourish a marriage.
- Privacy and intimacy are disrupted by the demands of the children.
- Work schedules and home routines need to be adjusted, sometimes dramatically.

Reducing Stress in Grandfamily Marriages

In *Relative Raising Children: A Guide to Finding Help and Hope*, the Brookdale Foundation provides some tips for successfully building our relationships while raising grandchildren:

- Make it a priority to regularly spend at least a little time together *without* the children.
- Share concerns by talking to each other. Don't bottle up your feelings. Make and keep the promise to fight nice- that means speak respectfully and kindly to one another when you disagree.
- Come up with a plan together of sharing the work as well as sharing the fun times.
- You cannot solve all the problems at once. Try finding a solution for a problem that causes the least amount of conflict, and then work towards a solution for one of greater conflict.
- Model for the kids how adults are caring towards each other during stormy times. Show them you are able to love each other even when you disagree.
- Exercise your sense of humor; whenever, you can make an opportunity.
- Remember your strong sense of purpose - together you are making serious sacrifices to keep your family together and provide for the children.

*Copies of our tip sheets may be found on our web site at www.mainekids-kin.org
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