

Taking care of your relationships with your partner

Grandparents, aunts and uncles who step in to take care of their grandchildren, nieces or nephews, may find themselves experiencing a different life in many respects. Taking care of a child often causes changes in relationships with our partners. Many people experience strain in their relationships due to the stress and additional responsibilities.

We know that as caregivers, it is important to take care of ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually. If we do not take care of ourselves, we make it more difficult to take care of our grandchildren, nieces or nephews. Our well-being affects the well-being of the children.

As part of taking care of ourselves, we need to take care of our important relationships, like the one with our partner, to make sure we continue to get that support. Sometimes this may feel like another responsibility to burden us, but it often does not take much to make a difference. According to professionals, when we listen, talk, show respect and trust and share a little humor, we are on our way to becoming a stronger family. Not all of us have partners or spouses, but some of the ways to support that relationship can also support friendships and other family relationships. Here are some suggestions:

Communicate: Talking about any situation with your partner may relieve stress. Keeping communication open between the two of you is essential. Listen to your partner talk about joys and frustrations, and talk about your own.

Show affection: This seems like an easy one, but in day to day surviving we may not notice how long it has been since we gave our partner a smile or a compliment. Remember those simple expressions of appreciation to the person who is sharing those joys and frustrations.

Set family rules that support your relationship: Be firm in setting rules for your children so that you and your partner have more time. For instance, try to have the children sleep in their own bed and have an early enough bedtime so you get some time alone. Sometimes you can help this to happen with extra bedtime support and reassurance. Or look for ways to make sure the children help out in housework, or to simplify family meals so you have more time.

Spend adult time together: Take that time to spend together. If you are not sure how to find childcare, talk to Maine Kids-Kin staff for ideas. Try to spend time alone with your partner, without feeling guilty or talking about the children. You might want to make “date” nights for an hour to do something simple like going out for a pizza, having lunch with your friends, going bowling, or simply walking around the block. If you think you cannot make time to enjoy a little peace or fun, you may have given yourself a prescription for burnout.

Maintain a balanced intimate relationship: The emotional and physical investment of raising children may affect a couples’ ability to maintain their intimate relationship. Sometimes it can help to just recognize that this is a common reaction to particularly stressful situations. A little humor can make a difference as well. We all have experienced how much better we feel after a hug. Human touch has therapeutic powers. Remember that physical connection with your partner helps you both to keep your balance in the sometimes challenging path of life.



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