

Tip Sheet For Relatives As Parents

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Grandfamilies Need a Break

We all know the feeling when we hear someone say, “I need a break!” We all need a break sometimes even when we are doing work of love, like raising children. It sometimes surprises people to know that often the children enjoy the “break” too.

The formal term for getting a break is respite. Many people want more respite and haven’t been able to get it. Here at Maine Kids-Kin, we often help people solve this problem. This tip sheet has suggestions that we learned from other grandfamilies and agencies.

There are three major challenges to getting a break.

1. Finding the right person or program willing to take care of the child
2. Having the money to afford the caretaker
3. Making sure that the break is worth the effort

Finding the right caretaker:

It helps to state your goal. What would you like to be able to do during respite? It may be time for errands, refresh yourself with exercise or a book, time with friends, a spouse or other children, or just time to do nothing! Then you can think about how much time do you need and when. For example: Would an hour or two off make a difference? Do you need it regularly or on call? How about a weekend away, or the child going for a week to some cool place?

Next it helps to be flexible. For example: if you can’t get a half-day that you wanted, would two hours be worth it? If you can’t get a week this month, should you plan for summer camp or is that too far down the road?

You will want to be clear about what you need from a caretaker. What will the caretaker need to be able to do for the child? Think about your child and his or her needs from a caretaker. What would be the best way for a new caretaker to learn about your child?

Most people find a caretaker from among their family or friends. People often think that providing respite would be a burden to someone, but it can be a lot of fun. For example, there may be an uncle who does not like to “babysit” but would be happy to go bowling with the child on Saturday morning. Think about who you can approach. You may be the person who usually takes care of others in the family. Sometimes it is surprising what other family members will do to help out.

There are also many kinds of programs that provide for the children and could provide you with respite while the children are busy. There are recreation programs like cheering, basketball or art class where you can drop off the kids and get time on your own. There are religion based programs through local churches, or town programs through local recreation departments, schools and libraries. Some children enjoy summer vacation bible school programs. There is a great booklet to learn about Maine’s many summer camps and an information sheet on camps serving children with special needs. Both are available at www.mainecamps.org or by calling Maine Youth Camping at 1-800-536-7712.

If you focus on your goal, you can get quite creative. Older kids may be able to volunteer. You may find an exercise program for yourself that has “drop-in” babysitting.

Money for Respite:

Often getting respite costs money. You may be eligible for respite funds from an existing program. Look at our Family Connections resource booklet on line at www.mainekids-kin.org/Forgrandfamilies.htm and click on the booklet in the right hand column. Or, call us for ideas and eligibility information. Maine Kids-Kin also has short term respite money, so do not be shy about asking us if you are eligible and if it is available.

Check out program scholarships. Many programs have a scholarship fund for people with financial need. They will probably want proof of your income. Some programs will also consider expenses as well so that if you have income, but high expenses, you may still be eligible.

It is not too early to think about Summer Camp – day or overnight. Maine Kids-Kin contracts with Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine (AFFM) to provide you with information and assistance getting scholarships for summer camp. Call them at 1-800-833-9786. You can also get information on scholarships from the Maine Youth Camping at the above website and phone.

You may be able to get respite without cash. If you are a two parent family, you might take turns having a night off. If you are a one parent family, you might make an exchange with someone else where you watch each others' children so you both get a break.

Getting the Most out of Respite:

Sometimes it seems that the cost of getting a break is more than the value of a break. Don't let this deter you! There are ways to bring the costs down.

- Do not be afraid to ask others for help. Very often other people want to help but assume that there is no way. You can help them learn there is!
- Some kids have difficulty with transitions and may be so upset after respite that you wonder if it was worth it. You can reduce this problem by explaining the plans carefully to the child, letting them practice being away for short periods of time, and giving them a chance to get comfortable with the caregiver before they leave.
- Pay attention to your real need. A man decided that he should learn to meditate to reduce stress in his life, but kept falling asleep instead. His meditation teacher told him not to worry, he just needed sleep more than he needed meditation! Be honest with yourself about what you need most from respite, and go for it!

Many people do not find respite easily, and some do not find it in a timely way. But, do not give up. Maine Kids-Kin staff are happy to brainstorm with you and we are continually finding out new information so that we have more to offer.



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