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[Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: How to Cope and Succeed](#)

Are you one of the 2.9 million grandparents in America who are raising their grandchildren? Although there are many good reasons to do this, it brings increased responsibility, stress and sacrifices that you probably didn't anticipate for your "golden" years.

Kin caregiving becomes necessary in families of all backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses and for many reasons, from military service to parental illness or death to child abuse or neglect. Census data reveal a significant increase in kin caregiving recently, probably due to the recession.

When called to provide care, you may be relieved that the children can be safe with you, but now you have a lot to do. You'll need to take care of getting the children enrolled in school, apply for financial and medical benefits, make sure they are seen by a pediatrician, perhaps arrange for counseling, consider pursuing custody or guardianship. The list goes on and on.

So how do you do this and still find time for yourself? Many grandparents respond to the children's needs first and try to take time for themselves later. Many never get to it -- an understandable choice, but ultimately you need to take care of yourself to be able to do the best you can for your grandchildren.

How Can You Cope?

Becoming a kin caregiver evokes many emotions, from the joy of having your grandchildren with you to feeling angry and resentful about your adult child being absent or about your losing so much -- your time, possibly your job, your independence, sleep, your financial security.

How can you cope?

- Staying healthy is important. Don't miss your annual physical or ignore symptoms that are new for you. Fit in some exercise. Walking is a lot better than nothing.
- Have some fun. Stay in touch with friends. Do things you enjoy.
- Find reliable people to talk with -- a trusted friend or family member, clergy or a counselor. Alternatively, join a support group where you can talk with others in similar situations and learn about services and resources for you and your family.
- When you feel overwhelmed and that you can't possibly get everything done, make a list of things to do, decide what has to get done now and what can wait, and schedule when you will do them. Literally, put them on your calendar.
- Talk with your grandchildren about what you're finding difficult. They may be having a tough time emotionally, but they also may be able to help more than you think.

All of this is easier said than done, and you can certainly expect that there will be times when you feel that you just can't take it anymore. That's par for the course when raising children. Sometimes it's wonderful to be with the kids; sometimes it's enough to make you furious or bring you to tears.

But sometimes caregiving can overwhelm anyone. You may not be able to do the things that really have to get done or lose patience more than you used to. You may feel hopeless or helpless or lose pleasure in everyday life. You may have trouble sleeping, more than the usual physical aches and pains, or be drinking too much. You may be withdrawing from the friends and support you need. These are all signs that your coping is running short and when you need to recognize that you need to take care of yourself in order to care for your grandchildren.

Raising grandchildren can be very satisfying, and it is always a challenge. Take care of your kids and take care of yourself. That's the best caregiving of all.

This post was co-written with Deborah Langosch, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., the Project Director of the Kinship Care Program at the Center for Trauma Program Innovation at Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services in New York City.