

Raising Grandkids

A Growing Trend

The number of grandparents who are raising their children is not a new phenomenon. However, the statistics are showing that it is a situation that is becoming more and more common.

Statistics Regarding Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

The Brookdale Grandparent Caregiver Information Project based at the University of California at Berkeley Center on Aging has said that in the last 10 years, the number of children living with their grandparents has increased by 50 percent.

According to a survey by AARP, 31% of adults are grandparents. Of that number, 8% are providing day care on a regular basis, and 3% are rearing a grandchild. The 2000 U.S. Census reports that 6.3% of US children under 18, 4.5 million, live in grandparent-headed households. There are no parents present in the lives of about one-third of these children.

This isn't something that just happens to a particular race or area or social class. It happens in all socioeconomic groups due to divorce, neglect, teen-age pregnancy, the death of the parents, incarceration, unemployment, abuse, alcohol or drug usage, or abandonment. It can happen to any couple.

Negative Impact on Marriage of Raising Grandkids

When grandparents take on a parental role it affects many aspects of their married life. The following stresses can severely damage a marriage.

It is estimated that it takes about a year for a couple to adjust to the many changes that result from caring for grandkids on a full time basis.

- They feel more stressed due to concerns about their own health and finances.
- Housing may be an issue if they are living in a senior citizen complex.
- The issue of medical care for the children is difficult.
- There is the loss of time for themselves and their dream of retirement dies.
- Their social life and circle changes drastically.

- There is also an emotional toll. Feelings range from fear, anger, exhaustion, resentment, grief, and shame to thankfulness and joy. This type of stress can damage a marriage.

Positive Impact on Marriage of Raising Grandkids

Even with these many negative stresses in their lives, many grandparents report that through it all, they feel a greater purpose for their lives.

Caring for their grandchildren makes them feel young and active. They say that the sacrifices are worth it.

What Grandparents Need

When grandparents take on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren, they need more than love. Here are some needs of full-time grandparents.

- Short term respite care. Full-time grandparents need to take a break from the kids now and then.
- Availability of affordable support groups and/or counseling services.
- Telephone hot lines.
- Free or affordable legal and financial advice.
- More money.
- Health insurance for the grandchildren.
- Good communication skills.
- Parenting education to update their knowledge of taking care of children. Some of the basics have changed.
- Awareness of what type of help and services are available to them in their local community. AARP's Benefits QuickLINK is a way to start gathering this information.

How to Cope

The following suggestions may help your marriage stay successful and long-lasting while taking on the role of parenting a second time.

- Share the workload between you.
- Keep the lines of communication open between the two of you.

- Together prioritize your goals, needs, and wants.
- Take small steps. Attempting to do too much will do you both in.
- Lower your expectations of yourselves, especially when it comes to housekeeping.
- Don't give up everything for your grandkids.
- Find ways to take trips with one another, even if it is only for a few days.
- It's okay to ask for help. AARP's Benefits QuickLINK provides helpful information.
- Join a support group of others in the same situation.
- Make time for yourselves. Your grandchildren need you to be healthy both physically and emotionally. You need time to re-group and to be re-energized.
- Remember why you are doing this. Focus in on what you have done right and not on what you are giving up.

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Courtesy: <http://marriage.about.com/cs/grandparenting/a/raisinggrandkid.htm>