

Grandcarers

Looking after Yourself

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In taking on your children's children, you may feel that you have lost yourself, so many things seem to have gone, like :

- your freedom
- your independence
- your retirement plans
- even friends - they have finished with childrearing and they don't want to know about it any more.

It is natural you might feel grief for:

- your child and all the dreams you had for them to have a happy life
 - Your grandchildren - they have lost their parents, and may still be suffering hurts caused by them
 - Your 'lost' self and the life you have given up.
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De-stressing

You may be dealing with very challenging behaviours from children who have been severely traumatised before they came into your care, and it may make your life very difficult as you struggle to try and repair that damage and to cope on a daily basis.

You may also be dealing with access visits with birth parents which you think cause ongoing stress and damage to your grandchildren, and of course, you too.

It is deeply painful and conflicting, to have to watch your own children causing emotional hurt to your grandchild. These are big stresses and strains for anyone to deal with and you need to be aware that grandparents are not super-humans.

We need to take care of ourselves and access all the help we can get to do that.

Looking after yourself

Have a pamper bath, regularly. Soaking in a hot bath is a simple and effective way of relaxing your body. If you add some Epsom Salts to the water and a few drops of water soluble lavender oil (available in your supermarket) you will have a recipe for deep relaxation and calm. Take a portable radio and listen to your favourite radio program, or listen to your favourite CD.

Call friends If it's difficult to get out, so keep your social life going by using the telephone or writing letters to keep in touch with friends and family. Don't lose touch with old friends because they don't handle your small children underfoot. Make regular phone calls to see how they are doing. Show that you still care about them, and they are more likely to be better at caring for you.

Footspa - these are small foot baths that vibrate and massage your feet in water. They are relatively inexpensive and some will work on reflexology points as well. You can also add a few drops of essential oils.

Wheat cushions - warmed in the microwave these cushions give instant warmth and comfort for the neck, shoulders or lower back. Add a little lavender oil before heating - just rub it on the surface of the bag.

Relaxation and visualisation CDs - these are very cheap to buy and well worth trying. Spoken word CDs usually last about 45-50 minutes so you need to get yourself comfortable and ensure you won't be interrupted. Great to use when the children are having a daytime sleep. They are also invaluable to help relax before going to sleep at bedtime.

Prioritise some activities each and every day that help you to release stress

Look after Yourself: RELAX

The best way to help your family on its way to a healthier life is to lead by example in fitness and exercise. No-one in the family is going to listen to you when you encourage them to play outside and later on to exercise and play sport, if you are not practising what you are preaching. Lead by example and your grandchildren will be far more encouraged to do the same. Daily strolls will lay down a habit of exercise that will benefit you all.

Quick Pick Me Ups to help you feel calm and energetic. Our body needs oxygen to give our muscles energy, and water for all bodily functions. Drinking water and breathing deeply are two great practices. So, set your stove timer to remind you every hour to take two minutes for you. Slowly drink a glass of water and then concentrate on a minute or so spent breathing deeply.

Relaxing together. If you are battling with your toddler to get them to have daytime sleep, perhaps you might consider replacing this with a "relaxation session" using gentle exercise and relaxation for a period of about twenty minutes per day which you do together. At the end of this session put on music or a story for them to listen to, and they may end up dozing off if there is no obvious agenda for them to have to sleep.

***Breathing in for a count of four and out for four. As you breathe in say to yourself
Breathing in I feel calm, Breathing out I release stress, Nothing to do, nowhere to go, only relaxing and breathing slow***

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Look after Yourself: Daily walks

There are so many great reasons to walk every day. You don't have to work up a sweat, and thirty minutes a day is enough to keep you on the right path to fitness and relaxation. If you have wee ones, then you will be pushing them in a stroller. A number of sleep experts suggest that if you take babies and small children for a walk late in the afternoon each day they will sleep better, and you will too.

Walking everyday will **increase your energy level.** Energy comes from energy. That's why the more you move, the more you feel like moving.

Walking everyday will **support you in feeling good about yourself.** There is an incredible sense of accomplishment that accompanies doing something that's good for you.

Walking everyday will **improve your ability to cope with stress.** It will help you relax and better manage the unexpected twists and turns of everyday life. Walking everyday will increase your overall sense of well-being. Regular physical activity will increase the release of the hormones that make you **feel happier and emotionally balanced.**

Walking everyday will **increase your mental acuity.** Research has shown that people who walk on daily basis think more clearly and are better able to focus and concentrate.

Walking everyday will help **you become physically fit and stay healthy.** It will improve your stamina and strengthen your muscles. It increases the efficiency of your heart and lungs. It also reduces your cholesterol levels, blood pressure and your risk of major illnesses such as heart attacks, diabetes and strokes. Walking every day promotes weight loss.



Avoiding back strain

Maintain your balance when carrying children. Carrying squirming toddlers around the house can wreak havoc on your balance. Use good body mechanics when lifting, no matter the child's age or temperament. When picking up the child, bend at your knees, not hips; widen your legs to get a broader base of support; hold the child close to your body so it is closer to your center of gravity; keep your shoulders back; and avoid slouching. Remember to hold the child balanced in the center of your body. Avoid holding your child in one arm and balanced on your hip.

Encourage independent steps. Lifting your grandchildren on and off the potty, or in and out of a car, stroller, or booster seat, over and over again, can give your muscles a pounding. A step stool can be your best friend. Let kids use the stool to try to get themselves on the toilet or into their car seats themselves. It will give them a sense of accomplishment, assist them to achieve independence, and save wear and tear on your arms, legs, and back.

Look for a stroller with handles that are high enough to avoid hunching and make sure that the wheels move easily and turn with little effort. Then you won't need to hunch and push the stroller with excess pressure on your back. Spacious pockets and pouches are important to carry bags.

Great gadgets to save bending! Easy trigger handle allows you to pick up very small items with no bending. Pharmacies sell them for around \$30

Getting up and down to floor level can cause a lot of knee fatigue, many grandcarers say that this is really hard for them. A good solution is to purchase a very sturdy timber table and chairs set for toddlers and use the little chair to sit on when you want to play with kids on the floor. Keep it near the little table and you can push on the table to rise easily. It's also handy to get a cloth shoe hanger with lots of pockets for the wall above the table and keep things like textas, scissors, toys etc there leaving table space free for serving snack and meals.

Removal of baby capsules should be done from the back seat of the car. Unlatch the capsule and place it on the seat of the car. Remove the capsule after you have exited the car and are standing perpendicular to the opening of the car door. At that time you should pull it as close as possible and lift the capsule as straight as you can and as close to your body as feasible. Also get toddlers used to you putting them into the car, and then they climb into the seat so that you are not twisting and lifting .

Want more information?

www.raisingchildren.net.au

For information on raising children, including information for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Parentline NSW

Phone 1300 1300 52

9am - 9pm weekdays and 4pm-9pm weekends for advice on child health and parenting

Centrelink Grandparents Advisers

Phone 1800 245 965

Information on payments and services available

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636 or 03 9810 6100

Website: www.beyondblue.org.au

The Beyond Blue website has fact sheets and information on mental health, and a Web Chat service 7 days a week from 4pm to 10pm or you can call them 24/7 on 1300 22 4636 to speak to a Beyond Blue counsellor.

Emergency contact numbers (24 hours):

Family and Community Services Reporting Line: 132 111

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Mental Health Access Line: 1800 011 511

Health Direct: 1800 022 222

Family Support Lines:

Domestic Violence Line: 1800 656 463

Women's Legal Service NSW: 1800 801 501

Indigenous Women's Legal Contact Line: 1800 639 784

Men's Referral Service: 1300 766 491

Local Services

Goonellabah Child & Family Health Service

Phone 02 6625 0111

9am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Lismore Community Health - Child and Family

Phone 02 6620 7687

8am – 5pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Family Support Network

Family Workers can offer you practical and emotional support to enhance & strengthen your parenting & family relationships.

Phone 02 6621 2489

www.fsn.org.au

Refer to Service Listing for contact details of other local services