

# GRAND RESOURCE

*Help for  
Grandfamilies  
Impacted by  
Opioids and Other  
Substance Use*



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# Practicing **Self-Care**



**// Because my grandson was in so much pain after my daughter left him all my focus was on helping him. I never had the chance to heal from my own loss, even though she was still alive"**

*Jan Wagner, Grandparent Caregiver*

When a grandfamily forms, every member must adapt to the new dynamic. As a grandfamily caregiver, you may have stepped into your caregiving role unexpectedly, instantly becoming responsible for children and putting their needs before your own. It is common for grandfamily caregivers to put the needs of the children they are raising before their own, and while this is done out of love and concern for the child, it often comes at the expense of the caregiver's health and wellness. Neglecting your own needs can also impact your ability to care for the child. Because the nature of caregiving is demanding, you will want to make sure you are practicing self-care. By caring for yourself, you are also ensuring better care for the child you are raising.

## **What is self-care?**

Self-care is identifying your needs and taking steps to meet them.<sup>1</sup> Think of self-care as an oxygen mask on an airplane: you have to put yours on first in order to help others.<sup>2</sup> Self-care is taking care of yourself so you can be the best caregiver possible.

## **What isn't self-care?**

Self-care is not selfish.<sup>3</sup> Self-care does not have to be expensive. It does not require you to add more to your busy life.<sup>4</sup> There is no one-size-fits-all approach to self-care. It is individualized to what works best for you and can be brief but satisfying and replenishing.

## **Why is self-care necessary?**

Caregiving can be extremely stressful and emotional, especially when the parent of the child you are caring for has a substance use disorder. Many caregivers report being sleep deprived, having poor eating and exercising habits, not taking time off when they are sick, and not making medical appointments for themselves.<sup>5</sup> Caregivers typically have significant stress and too much stress can be harmful to your health and overall wellness. It is not surprising that caregivers face increased risks of depression, chronic illness, and a decline in quality of life.<sup>6</sup> Self-care is necessary to find balance and find effective ways of coping.

## **How do I practice self-care?**

Practicing self-care requires thinking about your physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs and taking steps to meet them but usually not all at once! As a caregiver whose time and energy may already be stretched thin, “adding” self-care to your to-do list may feel overwhelming, but there are many ways that do not require adding more to your schedule. Self-care can take the form of reducing personal stress by saying no to things you do not want to or cannot do, and by communicating effectively about your needs and feelings. By learning to ask for help, stand up for yourself, and find healthy outlets to release your emotions, you can reduce significant stress.

### **Examples of Self-Care**

- Saying no to things you cannot or do not want to do
- Taking time off (or time to yourself) without feeling guilty
- Giving yourself space to grieve
- Talking with a loved one or trusted friend
- Sleeping regularly and for long enough
- Taking naps
- Eating well
- Going to the doctor when you are sick
- Going to the doctor for regular check-ups
- Going to counseling when needed
- Attending a support group
- Stretching
- Going on a walk or run
- Using stress-reducing techniques
- Listening to calming music
- Deep breathing
- Journaling
- Taking a hot bath or shower
- Meditation and/or prayer
- Enjoying nature
- Sitting in the sun
- Reading a good book
- Buying yourself something special like a candle or flower
- Going to a movie, dinner or another outing with a friend
- Hugging and receiving hugs from your children, friends and family members



## ***How do I ask for help?***

Asking for help can be one of the best forms of self-care for caregivers, but it can be very difficult, especially when you are overwhelmed. It is important to remember that asking for help does not mean that you are an inadequate caregiver. In fact, it is a sign of strength and resourcefulness. If you can, ask for help before getting overwhelmed. By learning to ask for help before you think you need it, you can avoid added stress and burnout.

When asking for help, be prepared for the person to say yes or no or hesitate with a response. Give them time to think about your request and if they say no, keep them in mind for helping you in the future. When people offer to help, give them concrete tasks and let them choose what they can do. Be as clear and specific as you can about what you need. Instead of saying things like “I would like to go to this” or “it’s okay if you can’t help me,” communicate directly by saying exactly what you would like help with, “I want to go to my grief group, can you watch Billy for me then?” It’s also helpful if you think about what a potential helper likes and dislikes when asking for help, for example, if you know they love cooking ask them if they could drop off a meal every other week.



## **Where can I find support if I cannot afford therapy or traditional counseling?**

Insurance companies and Medicare will typically cover a significant amount of the cost of therapy or counseling. If you call in or go online, you can find what options are available to you. If you have Medicaid, it usually will cover all the costs.

If those are not options for you, many hospice groups have free grief groups for the general public. Places of worship also offer grief groups or different support groups. There are an increasing number of support groups for grandparents and other relatives raising children and groups for people impacted by someone else's drug use.

A list of programs that may offer support groups like these can be found at [www.grandfactsheets.org](http://www.grandfactsheets.org).

### **Further Resources - Self-Care**

- Carezare "5 Self Care Tips for Caregivers with Limited Time"
- ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center "9 Steps to Respite Care for Grandfamilies"
- Family Caregiver Alliance "A Guide to Taking Care of Yourself"
- Family Caregiver Alliance "Caregiver Self-Care: Caring for You"
- National Alliance on Mental Illness "Taking Care Of Yourself"

### **Further Resources - Grandfamilies**

- [grandfactsheets.org](http://grandfactsheets.org)
- [grandfamilies.org](http://grandfamilies.org)
- [gu.org](http://gu.org)
- [www.brookdalefoundation.net/RAPP/rapp.html](http://www.brookdalefoundation.net/RAPP/rapp.html)

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1 Taking Care of YOU: Self-Care for Family Caregivers. Family Caregiver Alliance National Center on Caregiving. Retrieved from: <https://www.caregiver.org/taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers>.

2 Ibid.

3 Fact sheet nine: What is self-care? Retrieved from: [https://static.virtuallabschool.org/atmt/self/PS.Self\\_3.Environment\\_A1.WhatIsSelfCare.pdf](https://static.virtuallabschool.org/atmt/self/PS.Self_3.Environment_A1.WhatIsSelfCare.pdf) | Taking Care of YOU: Self-Care for Family Caregivers. Family Caregiver Alliance National Center on Caregiving. Retrieved from: <https://www.caregiver.org/taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers>.

4 Fact sheet nine: What is self-care? Retrieved from: [https://static.virtuallabschool.org/atmt/self/PS.Self\\_3.Environment\\_A1.WhatIsSelfCare.pdf](https://static.virtuallabschool.org/atmt/self/PS.Self_3.Environment_A1.WhatIsSelfCare.pdf)

5 Taking Care of YOU: Self-Care for Family Caregivers. Family Caregiver Alliance National Center on Caregiving. Retrieved from: <https://www.caregiver.org/taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers>.

6 Ibid.





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