

# Grandfamily Caregiver Tip Sheet: Self-Care



There are 2.6 million children in the US who are living in households headed by a grandparent, another relative, or close family friend without a parent present, occurring inside or outside of the child welfare system. These families, often referred to as “grandfamilies”, include approximately 30% of children in foster care being raised by grandparents or other relative caregivers.

## Why Do Grandfamily Caregivers Need Self-Care?

When children come into the household, often unexpectedly, grandparents and other relative caregivers frequently put their own needs aside for the child they are raising. Many caregivers report being sleep deprived, having poor eating and exercising habits, not taking time to rest when they are sick, and not making medical appointments for themselves. Additionally, the COVID pandemic has brought additional stressors, feelings of isolation, and health concerns into the lives of grandparents. Self-care practices can help grandparents be the best caregivers they can be! Being exhausted and stressed all the time can lead to serious health issues and decrease your capacity as a caregiver. By taking some time to take care of yourself, you can protect your health, be an even better caregiver, and encourage healthy habits among your kids!

## What is Self-Care?

Put simply, self-care is identifying your needs and actively taking steps to meet them in order to protect your personal well-being. When you care for yourself, you are also better able to care for others.



## Challenges to Self-Care for Grandfamilies

- Did you know that more than one-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered socially isolated?
- Grandfamilies disproportionately face barriers to self-care compared to traditional households. Grandparents and other older relative caregivers often live on fixed incomes, and many are forced to return to work to meet the additional costs of caring for a grandchild or multiple children. Difficulties include the cost of housing, food, transportation, respite and child care, and other financial barriers.

- After becoming caregivers for grandchildren or other relative kin, grandfamily caregivers often feel disconnected from their peers and sometimes struggle to maintain previous relationships.
- Many grandfamilies have faced trauma from losing loved ones, being exposed to substance use, experiences with a family member with an untreated mental illness, and involvement with the child welfare system, among other experiences. This increases the need for self-care practices, as trauma can lead to mental health problems and additional learning and behavioral difficulties in children.

## Self-Care Tips for Grandparent Caregivers

### Manage Your Stress Levels

- Stress can affect us all, so it's important to learn strategies to manage your stress. Self-care can help reduce your stress levels by learning to say no to things you cannot or do not want to do and recognizing when you are stretched too thin. Think about your physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs to identify tools that will help you reduce stress and focus on yourself.

### Keep Up a Healthy Lifestyle

- Maintain a balanced diet, stay active, and get quality rest when possible. Accessing medical care when you need it and keeping up to date on vaccinations can also help you keep up a healthy lifestyle.

### Take a Break

- Taking time to rest and relax is essential to avoid burnout and depression. Make sure you carve some "me" time out of your busy schedule and use it to really nurture yourself.
- Find respite where you can! Whether it's asking for a favor from a loved one to help out around the house or finding a sitter for a few hours to have some time to yourself, do not be afraid to ask for help if you're feeling overwhelmed.
- Download a wellness app to learn healthy strategies for maintaining self-care. Make a plan to practice at least one new type of self-care. Here are just a few examples of self-care to consider:

#### Examples of Self-Care

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saying no to things you cannot or do not want to do</li> <li>• Taking time off (or time to yourself) without feeling guilty</li> <li>• Giving yourself space to grieve</li> <li>• Going for a walk or run</li> <li>• Sleeping regularly and for long enough</li> <li>• Journaling</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Going to the doctor for regular check-ups</li> <li>• Taking naps and eating well</li> <li>• Attending a support group</li> <li>• Reading a good book</li> <li>• Meditation and/or prayer</li> <li>• Buying yourself something special</li> <li>• Going to dinner or another outing with a friend or loved one</li> </ul> |
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## Connect with Others

- Find a Peer-to-Peer Grandparent Caregiver Support Group near you! Many grandparents meet virtually or in-person to connect with other grandparents in similar situations to support one another. Hearing from others can be helpful and can even help you make new friends! Find information about a support group or other grandfamily support program near you at [www.grandfactsheets.org](http://www.grandfactsheets.org).

## Self-Care Resources

- [Help with Loneliness/feeling more connected: Humana - Far From Alone](#)
- [Connect2Tools to Overcome Social Isolation \(connect2affect.org\)](http://connect2affect.org)
- [Top Meditation Apps for Relaxation and Stress Relief \(aarp.org\)](http://aarp.org)
- [National Family Caregiver Support Program | Administration for Community Living](#)
- [Caring for YOUR Nutrition.pdf \(acl.gov\)](#)



## Mental Health Resources

- [Grand Resource: Help for Grandfamilies Impacted by Opioids and Other Substance Use | Generations United \(gu.org\)](#)
- [Mental Health Resources for Older Adults | SAMHSA](#)
- [Mental Health Warning Signs in Children: Resource For Parents and Caregivers | MentalHealth.gov](#)
- [Indian Health Service Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Find a Medicare or Medicaid Provider](#)
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)

## COVID-19 Resources

- [COVID-19 Fact Sheet for Grandfamilies and Multigenerational Families | Generations United \(gu.org\)](#)
- [Staying Connected While Staying Apart: Intergenerational Programs & the COVID-19 Pandemic | Generations United \(gu.org\)](#)
- [Facing a Pandemic: Grandfamilies Living Together During COVID-19 and Beyond](#)
- [COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness Resources for Grandfamilies from ACL](#)

## About Generations United

Founded in 1986, Generations United’s mission is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies and programs for the enduring benefit for all. In 1999, Generations United established the National Center on Grandfamilies, a leading voice for families headed by grandparents, other relatives and close family friends. Center staff conducts federal advocacy, provides technical assistance to state policy makers and advocates and trains grandfamilies to advocate for themselves. The Center’s network includes a broad group of organizations which provide a range of services to grandfamilies across the country including support groups, information and referral, case management, legal assistance, training and financial assistance. The Center has also championed a range of successful legislation to improve critical supports and services. It provides a range of information and resources available at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org) and [www.grandfamilies.org](http://www.grandfamilies.org). Generations United is also home to [The Grandfamilies and Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center](#), which provides a new way for government agencies and nonprofit organizations in states, tribes, and territories to collaborate and work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries – all to improve supports and services for kinship/grandfamilies.

## About Humana

Humana Inc. is committed to helping our millions of medical and specialty members achieve their best health. Our successful history in care delivery and health plan administration is helping us create a new kind of integrated care with the power to improve health and well-being and lower costs. Our efforts are leading to a better quality of life for people with Medicare, families, individuals, military service personnel, and communities at large. To accomplish that, we support physicians and other health care professionals as they work to deliver the right care in the right place for their patients, our members. Our range of clinical capabilities, resources and tools – such as in-home care, behavioral health, pharmacy services, data analytics and wellness solutions – combine to produce a simplified experience that makes health care easier to navigate and more effective. More information regarding Humana is available to investors via the Investor Relations page of the company’s web site at [www.humana.com](http://www.humana.com)

For further information, please contact Generations United at [gu@gu.org](mailto:gu@gu.org) or visit [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org).

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