

Holiday Harmony

By Helen Frost, CSU Intern, School of Social Work

For grandparent caregivers the holiday season can be filled with mixed emotions, including excitement for the grandchildren, a feeling of being overwhelmed by festive activities, or a feeling of dread about financial limitations and being unable to share in the rituals of the season. It is important during this time of year to handle situations, events and emotions in a way that will not make day to day living more difficult. As a grandparent caregiver it becomes especially important to take care of yourself mentally, emotionally and physically so that you are able to share the joys of the season with your grandchildren and family.

There are numerous ways that grandparents can manage the stress around the holiday season and create wonderful memories to share with their grandchildren. Suggestions for taking good care of yourself mentally and emotionally are to attend your community support group, reach out to friends within the support group who understand what you are going through, or have coffee with a friend to receive extra support and take a break from the challenges of the season.

For grandparent's it is especially important to take care of yourself physically. This means getting enough rest, take a nap or go for a walk with your grandchildren if you are able. Remember to maintain your routine as much as possible and if you are taking medications, make certain you follow doctors orders and take them as scheduled.

The holiday season is also a challenge for grandparents who do not have the resources to spend large amounts of money on gift giving or extravagant meals. Take care of yourself financially by preparing a realistic budget for the "extras" and give yourself permission to set realistic expectations about what you can afford or do during this holiday season. Stay in the 'here and now' when planning for the holidays by not comparing this season to holidays in the past.

This time of year may bring requests for extra visits from your adult child or your grandchild's biological parent. When appropriate, include your adult child or your grandchild's biological parent in activities; however, review the rules of visitation with the parent beforehand and remain firm about your expectations. Do not let things slide during this time of year because it is the holiday season; try to anticipate any problems that may arise and have a plan to address these issues.

Finally, it is acceptable to limit your plans to activities that you and your family decide are important rituals. You may determine that it is time to embrace a new tradition, perhaps buying a gingerbread house kit and working on it together as a family, introducing the idea of homemade Christmas gifts, baking together as a family. A new tradition might capitalize on the unique strengths or talents that you have as a grandparent.

As grandparents, do not believe that you have to do every thing or make up for the adult child or your grandchild's biological parent not being present in your grandchild's life. Instead, try to anticipate that your grandchild may have mixed emotions during this time of year. Perhaps grandchildren will become more sensitive or exhibit behaviors that you thought had been resolved, such as acting out or withdrawing. Try to reassure your grandchild and help him or her talk about his or her feelings in a safe and loving environment.

This article was taken from the following website:

<http://www.greenhouse.colostate.edu/grg/feature/holiday-harmony.html>