



Grandparents as Parents: I Still Need Time for Me

Have you ever felt like no one appreciates the time you put into caring for your grandchildren?

Time cannot be managed, nor can it be saved. It can only be used. Becoming an efficient time user has many payoffs, including increased satisfaction, more relaxation, and much less stress. The only thing you can really manage is people—and the person to begin with is yourself.

Your work or personal habits affect your use of time, and these habits are no harder or easier to change than other habits. Changing habits in order to use time more effectively requires self-discipline. The first step is to be honest with yourself and begin to identify some problem areas.



Managing Your Time

To use time wisely, you have to control time wasters. Only through self discipline will you have the time to do the things that are important to you. Here are some things you can do now to become a more effective time user:

- *Establish a plan* to help you see all of the tasks and activities you want to accomplish. Set priorities according to what needs to be accomplished in a day, a week, or a month. Break the job into many little tasks.

- *Use a to-do list.* Write down those things you intend to accomplish during the day, and prioritize the list. This will keep you on track and provide a benchmark for judging the importance of anything else that comes up during the day. Start with the most important item on your list, and stay with the task until you have finished it before moving on to the next item. This will give you a sense of accomplishment because you are now completing the tasks that are most important to you.
 - *Use your prime time*—the time of the day when you are at your highest energy level. Use prime time for jobs requiring the most attention and effort.
 - *Try delegating tasks.* You do not need to do everything yourself. Give some of the tasks to the grandchildren. When delegating, be certain to inform them of their tasks, time limits, and resources.
 - *Learn to say, “No.”* This allows you to exercise control over your life so you can spend time productively on the activities that are most meaningful to you. It can also give you more time for other things.
- Here are a few tips to help free-up time for yourself:
- *Practice the barter system* by swapping jobs with family members or others.
 - *Do two things at once.* Identify small tasks you can do with something else, such as unloading the dishwasher while talking on the phone. Or, you could have the grandchildren help with the dishes, making it a time you can

spend with the grandchildren.

- *Use your waiting time.* Keep a list of five- or 10-minute tasks that can be done while you wait for others, like balancing the checkbook while waiting to pick up grandchildren or making a to-do list during practices.
- *Clean the clutter.* Create a comfortable work area; throw away unnecessary papers; sell or give away unused items, and have a place for everything.
- *Eliminate any once-useful habits* that are now first-class time wasters.

These tips can help you to set some goals for better use of your time. The exact methods you use are less important than recognizing that time is a very valuable resource, and it should be allocated according to a plan that reflects your priorities. Finally, remember you are an important person. Become responsibly selfish. Find time and space to concentrate, and relax by making time for yourself.

Avoid Wasting Time

Wasting time means not using your time efficiently. Being accountable for every minute of the day is exhausting. Using time poorly, however, means we do not finish our work, which leads to frustration and anxiety. Here is a list of common time wasters. Do you recognize any that waste your time?

- You worry about something you have no control over, such as events that happened yesterday.
- You don't communicate effectively.
- You are negative, defensive, critical, or petty.
- You're inflexible or rigid in the way you do things or in how the grandchildren do things.
- You say "Yes" to every request.
- You don't take time for self-renewal.
- You don't schedule time for a healthy, enjoyable family life—things like taking a walk or going to the park with the grandchildren.

To accomplish more with your time, try planning backwards, which may work better than planning ahead. This can release stress and help you manage your time by being on schedule. For example, if you have an 8 p.m. meeting, plan this way. It takes 15 minutes to get there, so I must leave by 7:45. I must change clothes by 7:30. I need to be finished eating by 7:15 and must be preparing dinner by 6:30. Now that is the kind of backward thinking that works.

Developing Better Understanding

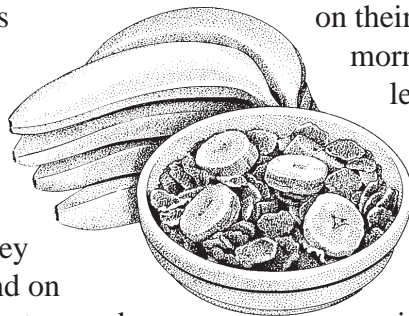
Understanding your grandchildren will help you make time for yourself because you won't be wasting your time and energy on long discussions or arguments.

The following exercise will help you develop empathy, which is the ability to put yourself in

Healthy Breakfast, Healthy Grandkids

When you get up in the morning, it's been about 12 hours since your last meal, and your body has used up the food energy from dinner.

If you don't eat again until lunch, it will be nearly six more hours before any new food energy gets into your system. No wonder students who skip or skimp on breakfast often feel run down during the morning. And, no wonder they don't do as well in school and on the playground as kids who eat a good breakfast. Sending a child to school without breakfast is like sending him into a classroom without books.



Study after study has confirmed that there is, in fact, a connection between eating breakfast and learning. Children who eat breakfast score higher on achievement tests, are more focused on their work, and they don't have a mid-morning slump. They are just better learners. Children who skip breakfast, on the other hand, are more likely to be listless and not interested in learning.

When you skip breakfast, it's hard to make up the nutrients you miss. If your grandchild does not participate in a breakfast program at school, make sure you do your best to provide a healthy breakfast at home.

the place of others to better comprehend their feelings. While doing this practice, you will begin to understand the needs of your grandchildren by remembering what you were like at their age. This will help you to get in touch with your past, because recalling gives you an opportunity to create positive outcomes for others. Here's how:

- Set aside some time, and find a quiet place for yourself.
- Choose the person you wish to understand better.
- Think back to the time when you were the age of that person.
- Visualize your life then—where you lived, what you were doing, and how you felt about yourself, your family, and your friends.
- Remember some specific experiences, and let your feelings in. Do you remember how you looked and how you dressed?
- What did you like to do then?
- What did you worry about?
- What pleased you and helped you?
- What do you wish was different about that time in your life?
- Looking back, what do you wish you'd known then?

Handle with Kid Gloves

Caring for children is one of the toughest jobs around. Sometimes the frustration can get the best of us. If too much tension starts to build and you are tempted to smack a child or start yelling, back off.

Take some deep breaths, or do as many push-ups or sit-ups as you can manage. Talking with another parent or grandparent can also help relieve those times of strain that nearly everyone who cares for children experiences.

Sometimes, instead of hitting, a frustrated adult will vigorously shake a child, thinking this to be a safe way of venting anger or enforcing discipline. Do not shake a child. Shaking a child can cause serious brain damage, and even death. It is particularly risky with children under one year of age.

Children are fragile. Handle with care.

- After you have given yourself a good visit with the person you were at that age, think about the person you have in mind.
 - ◆ What are the similarities and differences between the person and you at that age?
 - ◆ What needs does that suggest?
 - ◆ What are the implications for your relationship?
 - ◆ What can you do?

Although many things change, many things stay the same. Our own experiences can offer us the understanding that helps us develop ideas for what our grandchildren need, how we can connect with them, and how we can support them.

Loving Yourself

As a grandparent, there are times when you might resent your grandchildren. You may do more and more for the grandchildren and receive less and less appreciation for it. When you begin to feel resentful, it is time to work on loving yourself.

This means taking time for yourself and respecting yourself. It means learning to enjoy your unique talents.

When you love yourself, you can admit you are not perfect and recognize that you're doing your best. Loving yourself will give you the energy needed to continue taking care of your family. The grandchildren can learn from your positive example; it will help them to accept and value themselves, as well.



For inspiration. . .

If I had my life to live, over, I'd like to make more mistakes next time. I'd relax. I would limber up. I would be sillier than I have been this trip. I would take fewer things seriously. I would take more chances. I would climb more mountains and swim more rivers. I would start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall. I would go to more dances. I would ride more merry-go-rounds. I would pick more daisies.

Nadine Stair, age 85

Grandparents Certainly Are Misunderstood!

You thought you were happily smiling at your grandchild from a hard stadium seat or a hot packed auditorium, but he looked at your face and saw approval of him and joy in what he was doing.

You thought that you were just patting him on the back or on the head or just ruffling his hair, but he cherished the warm loving touch, and his heart was brightened.

You thought you were reading a bedtime story with all the funny and scary voices, but he enjoyed the fact you read every word even though he had heard them a hundred times before.

You thought you were letting your grandchild help paint the house even though the paint got kind of runny and drippy in places, but he knew that you were working together as a family and felt a sense of accomplishment as a family.

You thought you were singing silly songs or counting the cows on a long boring trip, but he learned that it was fun being together no matter where you were.

You thought you were just spending a few minutes of your time playing a board game, but he realized that your time is precious and knew you were investing it in him.

You thought that you asked your grandchild's opinion about something that wasn't too important, but he thought you asked because his opinions and thoughts were important.

You thought you were being a good host by inviting your grandchild's friends in for a snack on a warm summer day, but he knew that his friends were important to you and always welcome in your home.

You thought the tears in your eyes went unnoticed when your grandchild accomplished an important goal in his life, but he knew that he was deeply imbedded in your heart, and you sensed his accomplishment.

You thought that the refrigerator was as good of a place as any for hanging all the art work and "well done" papers that came home from school, but he felt important when he came home from school each day with something to show you and tack up in his personal hall of fame.

You thought you gave your grandchild some simple chore or job to do and told him, "Well done," with a smile when he did it, but he learned responsibility and began to realize he could tackle even tougher things.

You thought you were helping a troubled restless child get some sleep by fixing a cup of hot cocoa, but your grandchild felt that you were opening your heart around a kitchen table and making all the problems a lot smaller.

You thought the vacation wasn't much of a success because the fish didn't bite and the sun didn't shine, but he still remembers everything that happened, and he still laughs at all of the funny parts.

You thought you were just giving him a quick hug at a special moment or "just because," but your grandchild carried it with him for a long time, because what you really said was, "I'm proud of you!" and "I love you!"

You thought you were just giving him a little kiss on the cheek to tell him goodbye as he left for school, but your grandchild felt warm and loved because he knew there would be another one waiting for him when he got home.

Come to think of it, there are a lot of times when grandparents really are misunderstood!

*Adapted from *Parents Certainly Are Misunderstood!* by Steven C. Staats*

See the Texas AgriLife Extension Service Grandparents Raising Grandkids website for more information:

<http://grandparentsraisinggrandkids.tamu.edu>

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