

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Caregiving Stress—Symptoms and Causes The Warning Signs of Stress

When you experience an unusual level of stress, certain warning signals occur. Answering the following questions will increase your awareness of these signs.

Circle your answer:

- | | | |
|-----|----|---|
| Yes | No | 1. Do you feel a loss of energy or zest for life? |
| Yes | No | 2. Do you feel out of control, exhibiting uncharacteristic emotions or actions? |
| Yes | No | 3. Do you lack interest in people or things that were formerly pleasurable? |
| Yes | No | 4. Are you becoming increasingly isolated? |
| Yes | No | 5. Are you consuming an increased amount of sleeping pills, medications, alcohol, caffeine, or cigarettes? |
| Yes | No | 6. Are you having health problems—for example: high blood pressure, ulcers, or difficulties with digestion? |
| Yes | No | 7. Do you have difficulty falling asleep at night, awakening early, or sleeping excessively? |
| Yes | No | 8. Are you experiencing appetite changes? |
| Yes | No | 9. Do you have problems with concentration or memory? |
| Yes | No | 10. Are you increasingly irritable or impatient with others? |
| Yes | No | 11. Do you have thoughts of suicide? |

A “yes” answer to even some of these questions can indicate stress that has become debilitating. Recognizing the source of this stress is the next step in dealing with its destructive effects.

The Causes of Stress

The causes of stress vary with the responsibilities and the caregiver. What creates stress for you may not create stress for someone else. There are, however, some common sources of caregiving stress, which we raise in this next series of questions.

Circle your answer:

- | | | |
|-----|----|--|
| Yes | No | 1. Are you experiencing multiple demands on your time, energy, or money?
What are they? |
| Yes | No | 2. Do you feel that your responsibilities conflict? Which ones? |
| Yes | No | 3. Is there a difference in expectations between your spouse, your adult child,
your grandchild, yourself? What are they? |
| Yes | No | 4. Do you feel a lack of understanding about the stages of growth and
development of your grandchild? |
| Yes | No | 5. Do you feel a lack of understanding of effective ways to guide and discipline
your grandchild? |
| Yes | No | 6. Do you have difficulty meeting your grandchild's physical, intellectual, or
emotional needs? |
| Yes | No | 7. Are you pressured by financial decisions and a lack of resources? |
| Yes | No | 8. Do you feel a "loss of freedom," a sense of being "trapped"? |
| Yes | No | 9. Is there disagreement among family members? |
| Yes | No | 10. Do you feel that other family members aren't doing their share? |
| Yes | No | 11. Does your adult child place unrealistic demands and expectations on you? |
| Yes | No | 12. Is there a lack of open communication with your adult child and your
grandchild? |
| Yes | No | 13. Do other family members have negative attitudes that you have trouble
contending with? |
| Yes | No | 14. Are there concerns about your adult child's condition that are painful to
watch and that you don't understand? |
| Yes | No | 15. Are there other problems with children, marriage, employment, or health?
What are they? |
| Yes | No | 16. Do you blame yourself for your adult child's or grandchild's problems? |
| Yes | No | 17. Do you have concerns or questions about legal issues of parenting your
grandchild? |

Now look carefully at the questions to which you answered "yes." You will want to focus your full attention on these specific sources of stress as we talk about ways to reduce stress.

Adapted from *Coping with Caregiving*, Vicki Schmall and Ruth E. Stiehl, Pacific Northwest Extension Publication (PNW 3 15), Oregon State University, by Judith Warren, Professor & Special Initiatives Coordinator, and Dorothy James, Family Life Specialist (retired), Family and Consumer Sciences, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, The Texas A&M System, College Station, Texas.