

Tips on parenting in your golden years

By **TRESA ERICKSON**



If you find yourself raising your grandchildren, be sure to nurture them and always show them that you care.

It doesn't seem possible, but you're nearly 65 and you're about to tackle the challenge of parenting again.

Your daughter just can't do it anymore, so while she resolves her problems, your 5- and 7-year-old granddaughters are moving in with you. Once again, you're going to play the roles of chauffeur, maid, counselor, mentor and disciplinarian. You're going to be a mother, and right now, you're feeling too old to be one.

But don't worry. You're not alone. According to the 2000 census, 4,533,016 children under the age of 18 live in a household headed by a grandparent, some with their parents, many without.

Every year more and more grandparents are called upon to parent their grandchildren. Reasons range from substance abuse and AIDS to neglect, teen pregnancy, death, divorce, unemployment and imprisonment.

No matter what the reason, grandparents who decide to raise their grandchildren face many challenges.

Children are costly, and grandparents on fixed incomes may find it difficult to stretch their budget to cover their needs and the children's.

Even though they are related to the children, grandparents may have trouble enrolling their grandchild-

ren in school or obtaining medical care for them.

Grandparents who are in poor health may find it even more difficult to raise their grandchildren, especially if the children are grieving over the loss of their parents or dealing with tough physical, emotional or behavioral problems.

If you have chosen to raise your grandchildren and are facing these challenges, there are some steps you can take to make the situation better for yourself and your grandchildren.

Making life better for yourself

- Consult a lawyer and find out about custody issues and financial planning.

- Become part of a support group for grandparents raising grandchildren. Share your feelings with others who are facing simi-

lar issues and learn how they are tackling those issues.

- Contact your state department to see if any assistance is available for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

- Take care of yourself. Eat right, get plenty of exercise and see your doctor

regularly.

- Stay in touch with your children. Remember, they are your grandchildren's parents, and in spite of their problems, they probably miss their children. At some point, they may also recover and regain custody.

- Schedule time for yourself. Ask a friend or relative to baby-sit and go to a movie, visit a friend or take a long walk in the park.

Making life better for your grandchildren

- Nurture your grandchildren. Let them know that they can talk to you about anything and show them you care. Hug and kiss them often, but stop if it bothers them.

- Have realistic expectations of your grandchildren. Remember that they have been through a rough time, and it may take them

awhile to recover and adjust.

- Set an example for your grandchildren. Children imitate adults. If you want your grandchildren to behave a certain way, then you must behave that way.

- Try to understand your grandchildren's behavior before you punish them. Think about what they have been through, and determine if their behavior is a result of that. You may have to seek professional help to deal with grandchildren who have severe behavioral problems.

- Base your parenting style on your grandchildren's maturity level rather than their age. Children mature at their own pace. Those who have suffered trauma may not be

as mature as others their age. Treat them accordingly.

It's not easy being a parent in your golden years, but it can be done. You may have to give up some of your dreams and make sacrifices, but you will have the opportunity to shape your grandchildren's lives. Your life will have a greater sense of purpose, and your children will have the time to get their lives together.

Many grandparents who take on the responsibility of raising their children often feel their life has been enriched. Perhaps you will, too, and someday when your grandchildren are grown, you will know that you helped them become who are they.



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