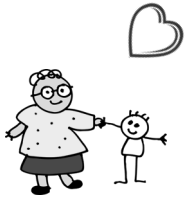


*GRAND*parents Connection



For Grandparents Raising Grandchildren



The Importance of Social Health

Dear Grandparents,

Since March of 2020 our lives have changed immensely. We have become accustomed to new things as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic including social distancing. While the immediate social distance was necessary to prevent the spread of the virus, the long-term impact of social isolation may have taken a toll on not only social health, but also on emotional and physical health. As you care for your grandchild you may feel socially isolated and it's important to remember that social health is an important part of the 8 dimensions of wellness.

The many ways you care for yourself should include eating a nutrient dense diet, exercising, relaxing, getting quality sleep and spending time with friends and family socially. In order to care for your grandchild properly, make all areas of wellness a priority including social, emotional, intellectual, physical, professional, financial, environmental and spiritual wellness. Of course, it is easy in theory to make changes for better health but sticking with them may not be as easy. Consider the safety talk on airplanes when you start to put your own good health aside; the airline personnel instruct you to put your oxygen mask on before assisting others. If you are not caring for yourself then caring for others is going to be near impossible. Don't feel guilty about caring for yourself and the time it may take away from other things, remember your family needs you and finding time for self-care will help them too.

In this newsletter we will look at the importance of caring for yourself and how social interaction can support you as a caregiver to be healthy and more fulfilled. Try to remember social interactions that brought you joy before the pandemic or before caring for your grandchildren and try to seek ways to do those things or find some new social interactions to support your overall well-being.

Christine Zellers, MPP

FCHS Educator /Assistant Professor
Family and Community Health Sciences
Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County
609-465-5115, Ext. 3609

This newsletter was written in collaboration with Jacklyn Herrera, Stockton University Public Health Intern.

The 8 Dimensions of Wellness



The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Association (SAMHSA) has 8 Dimensions of Wellness. These are physical, emotional, social, professional, intellectual, spiritual, environment and financial. Wellness is not just physical and mental well-being but achieving balance and happiness in these 8 areas so that you are physically and mentally sound. It's important to note that achieving all 8 of these dimensions may not be easy and could require some changes in habits and even support and help from others both personally or professionally. Be aware of the 8 dimensions to assist with setting overall wellness goals that are practical and realistic.

When trying to achieve social wellness, think about things you enjoy doing, or areas you wish to be more involved in to make you feel socially involved.

Volunteering is a good way to achieve social contact. It can make you feel more involved and fulfilled, think about things you enjoy, then try volunteering doing things you like most. For instance, if you are a history buff, maybe a local historical museum would be a good place to volunteer to meet others who like history.

How about your neighbors, try making small talk with them or waving until you develop a relationship or can have engaging conversations when passing by.

Ways to get socialization...

Start a social group if you can't find anyone to socialize with by focusing on your interest, like a book club. If you don't know how to get a social club started, think about what you like to do and contact your local library to see if they can help. If you are not super social or don't want to start your own group, look for an existing one to join and find some social wellness that way. If you are feeling socially isolated as a result of raising your grandchildren, then while at a Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program try to develop a friendship to meet others who may be feeling lonely too.

Exercise is a good way to find support too, go to a local fitness center and meet new people or call an old friend that you may have lost touch with and meet to go for a walk.

The senior centers in Cape May County are placed throughout the county and offer social interactions and activities during the week while the grandchildren are in school. The senior centers could be the perfect way to share a meal and make new friends.

Social interaction is important for the health of older adults and seniors. During the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19), many older adults lacked social interaction due to social distancing, state curfews, and CDC guidelines. A study was conducted in 2018 to analyze how older adults felt being away from others and the results concluded that 27% of older adults felt isolated from others. Two years later in 2020, the same group of older adults was asked how they felt being away from others and 56% reported feeling isolated. This study demonstrates how the pandemic affected socialization and created an increased feeling of isolation by adults and seniors.

Finding ways to be socially active improves mood and supports better physical health too.

Being social at any age has important benefits like keeping the mind sharp, good mental health and a feeling of fulfillment.

As we age, our health is at risk for cognitive impairment, and disability, but researchers have established that socializing improves cognitive abilities and memory processing. Surrounding yourself with a positive social group assists with cognitive functions and can lead to a better mood while decreasing symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Socializing also prevents dementia and early onset Alzheimer's Disease. Socialization supports better well-being in emotional and mental health too. Loneliness and the lack of social interaction are linked to depression. Socializing can improve mental health and positive relationships with friends and family which supports better mental and emotional health.

Socializing can help us live longer too, researchers have found increased social interaction decreases the risk of mortality and diseases. Participating in clubs, social events, and having positive relationships lowers the risk of inflammation, high blood pressure, irregular stress response, and sleep deprivation. Additionally, it prevents the development of cardiovascular disease.

Having positive social interactions will improve overall wellness and support the other dimensions of wellness for optimal health benefits. Something that may seem as simple as a conversation can benefit social wellness, talk to your grandchildren, your daughters and sons, your siblings, neighbors, coworkers, friends, and anyone you enjoy spending time with to boost your wellness!

Senior Centers offer a variety of activities and opportunities for socialization.

Lower Cape Senior Center
2612 Bayshore Road
Villas, NJ 08251
Phone: 609-886-5161

North Wildwood Senior Center
10th and Central Avenues
North Wildwood, NJ 08260
Phone: 609-522-7611

Ocean City Senior Center
1735 Simpson Avenue
Ocean City, NJ 08226
Phone: 609-399-0055

Upper Township Senior Center
1369 Old Stagecoach Road
Palermo, NJ 08230
Phone: 609-390-9409



For more information about FCHS and the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group, visit our **Website**:
<http://capemay.njaes.rutgers.edu>

Follow us on **Facebook**
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and join the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Facebook Group.

The Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group

is a program of Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County Family & Community Health Sciences that provides educational and social support to grandparents residing in Cape May County who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren.

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The GRANDparents Connection is published for grandparents raising their grandchildren.

The **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group** and all of Rutgers Cooperative Extension's educational programs are offered without regard to race, religion, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County

355 Court House – South Dennis Road
 4 Moore Road, DN 703 (mailing address)
 Cape May Court House, NJ 08210
 (609) 465-5115 Ext. 3609

Editor:

Chris Zellers, MPP

Family and Community Health Sciences Educator/Assistant Professor
 Department of Family and Community Health Sciences
 Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County

zellers@njaes.rutgers.edu

Phone: 609-465-5115, Ext. 3609

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