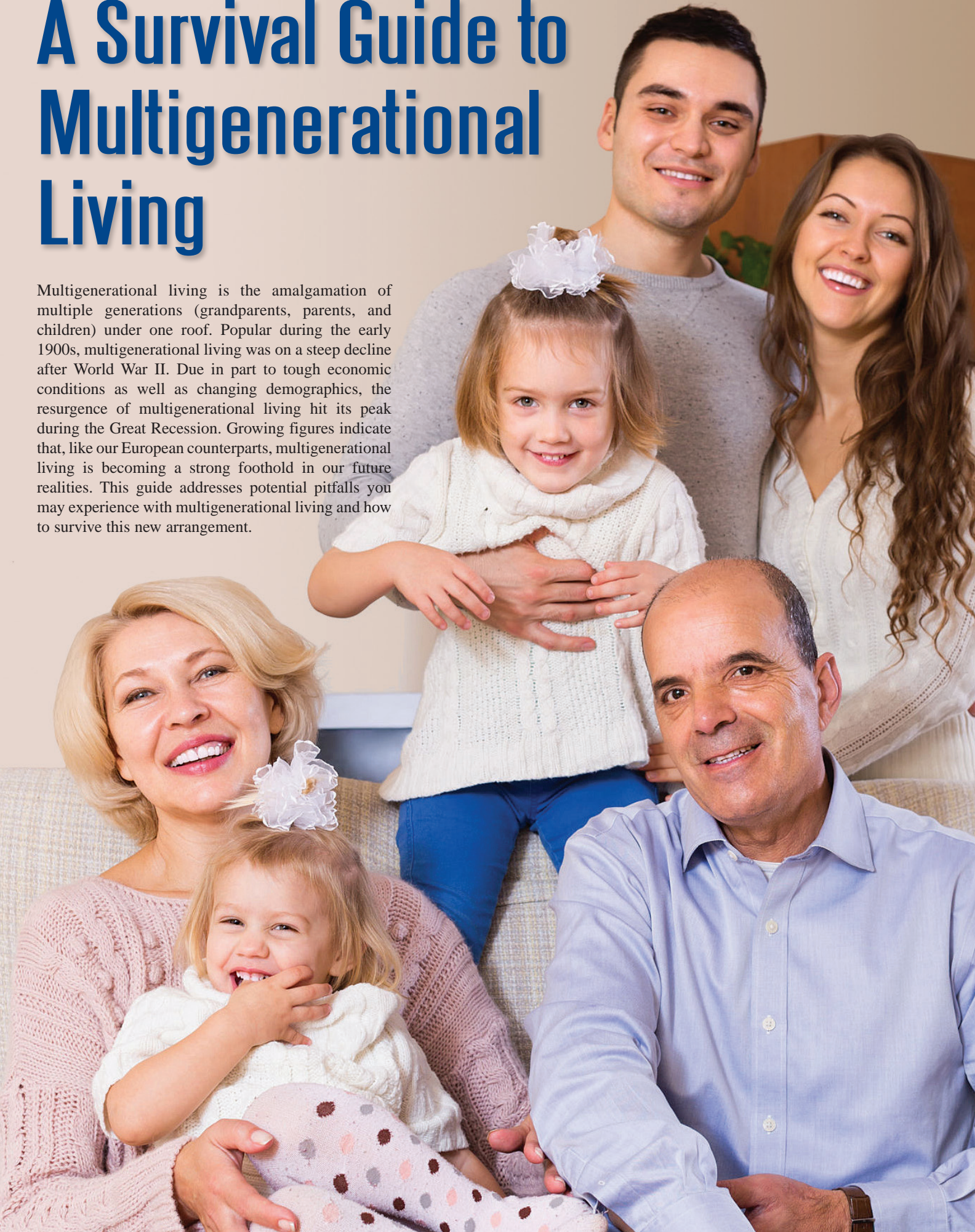


A Survival Guide to Multigenerational Living

Multigenerational living is the amalgamation of multiple generations (grandparents, parents, and children) under one roof. Popular during the early 1900s, multigenerational living was on a steep decline after World War II. Due in part to tough economic conditions as well as changing demographics, the resurgence of multigenerational living hit its peak during the Great Recession. Growing figures indicate that, like our European counterparts, multigenerational living is becoming a strong foothold in our future realities. This guide addresses potential pitfalls you may experience with multigenerational living and how to survive this new arrangement.



COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

The key to any functional household is effective communication. Before embarking on this new journey, it is important that all current and new members of the household sit down and express their concerns and needs. Money and housework are often areas of stress in a family, and if the issue was prevalent beforehand, you can expect it to resurface full force after the dust has settled. Creating a family budget or delegating financial responsibilities to different members of the family builds a foundation of trust and teamwork. It is important to take into account each member's means so that financial obligations can remain consistent. Older generations who do not have a steady stream of income will likely not be able to contribute as much as their working children. Do not force family members to bite off more than they can chew because, in the long run, this will just result in headaches. With added occupants, the utility bills and grocery costs are sure to increase quite a bit. Allowing other members of the family to help provide will cover this added cost and will avoid any further tension. Creating a budget that is feasible and fair allows everyone to feel like a contributing member of the family.

The need for communication does not end after the initial agreements are made. Multigenerational living can be quite an adjustment, and there will be a number of situations that could not have been prepared for. Financial troubles, medical emergencies, and general mishaps are part of life. Unexpected occurrences can be a large source of stress and strain on a family, which can lead to frustration and anger. It is important that family members speak constructively about issues in the home so that the problem can be resolved early on. Instead of bottling up your feelings and blowing up about the issue months later, nipping the problem in the bud will ensure that the issue does not occur again.

CREATE BOUNDARIES

For a nuclear family that has never cohabitated with a set of grandparents, there is going to be quite an adjustment period. These parents have become accustomed to being the heads of the household and caring for their dependent children. Introducing an older generation may make these parents feel as though their decisions are being questioned and their methods critiqued. While there have been instances where parents move in with their children to a grandparent's house, it is more likely that the oldest generation will move into the children's house. Just as this is an adjustment for the younger generations, the older generation has likely spent years running and maintaining a home. Multigenerational living may feel like a step backward for some, and they will have to come to terms with their reduced authority and autonomy. Creating boundaries is important so that neither generation impedes the other's freedom nor imposes on the other's decisions. It is important to take all family members' opinions into account. While some decisions may be at the sole discretion of the homeowner, it can create a more harmonious environment when everyone feels as though they can provide input.

The discipline of children is one area in which boundaries are especially necessary. Grandparents already have the experience of raising children to maturity under their belt, so they may feel as though they know what's best when it comes to their grandchildren's upbringing. This can be a source of frustration because a parent may discipline a child only for it to be undone by a grandma or grandpa

the very next day. Grandparents should trust their children with the upbringing of their grandchildren and follow any rules or guidelines that have been set in place. Grandchildren should also be taught that their parents' rule is law and that they should not undermine them by taking advantage of their grandparents.

Finally, privacy is something that can seem fairly elusive in multigenerational households. It is important to speak with other family members and let them know which areas are off limits or when you would like to have some alone time. Making sure that every member of the family has a space that they feel is their own is very important. Divvy up responsibilities so that certain members can have a chance to relax after a long day. Rotate these responsibilities every couple of days so everyone gets an opportunity to unwind.

MAKE ORGANIZATION A PRIORITY

The home can be a hectic place on any given day. Kids have afterschool activities and projects to complete, parents worry about finances and household duties, and grandparents have doctors' visits and chores of their own. Attempting to complete all these tasks with no preparation or organization can result in reduced productivity and quite a few headaches. Create a calendar and place it in a heavily trafficked area, such as the kitchen, so that each member of the family can write down important events and dates to allow everyone to be on the same page. If there are fewer cars than there are drivers in the house, this is especially important so that no one has to scramble last minute to find a ride to an important event.

Organization is also essential for keeping track of household chores. Children may use their grandparents moving in as an opportunity to skip out on chores because they know someone else in the house will complete them. Chore schedules ensure that every member of the family is engaged and contributing to the upkeep of the home. Every member of the family will have strengths and weaknesses. Maybe Grandma is an excellent cook but realistically cannot be outside raking leaves. Ensure that chore schedules play to everyone's strengths so that chores are done correctly the first time around. Additionally, rotate the unwanted chores so that no one person is stuck doing the most tedious tasks in the house. When conflicts arise, and they will, communicate effectively as a family and find a way to rework the schedules so that everyone feels satisfied.

HAVE PATIENCE

Multigenerational living isn't always easy, and there may be some tough times, but keeping a positive attitude and having patience will get you through it. Training yourself to change certain habits for the sake of peace or reworking aspects of your daily routine in order to be more accommodating can be a slow moving process but a step in the right direction. Learn to laugh at certain mishaps and treat them as learning experiences. Always work with your family towards a solution rather than against them in an argument. Multigenerational living does result in increased costs and complications, but it brings with it added love and happiness. Children grow up seeing the loving dynamic between their parents and grandparents and benefit from this healthy relationship. Having the most important people in your life under one roof can seem like an endless vacation if you just put in the work to ensure it is one. 🌳

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Home & Yard Magazine