

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren



A Resource Guide

**State Representative Eddie Day Pashinski
121st Legislative District**

Pennsylvania Grandparents Raising Grandchildren:

In 2017, over 90,000 Pennsylvanian grandparents are responsible for the basic needs of one or more grandchildren under the age of 18. These grandparents are caring for approximately 195,000 children, which is 7.5 percent of all children in our state. Over 20 percent of these grandparents are living below the poverty level.

Kinship caregivers, particularly grandparents, face a variety of emotional, legal and daily living challenges as they unexpectedly find themselves in the position of raising a second family. Many factors contribute to the dramatic increase in the number of kinship care families, including:

- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Teenage pregnancy
- HIV/AIDS
- Incarceration
- Divorce

This six-part booklet addresses the challenges faced by grandparents and older relative caregivers.

The first three parts detail the basic information on kinship care families, advice on caring for a young child as a grandparent and relationships with others, information on the helpful aspects of belonging to a kinship care support group and how to begin a support group in your area.

The last three sections include program ideas for grandparents and other caregivers, legal issues commonly faced by caregivers and a list of resources of where and how to find help when faced with kinship care issues.

Kinship Care Families

More and more grandparents are becoming the primary caregiver for their grandchildren.

Kinship care is defined as the full-time nurturing and protection of children who must be separated from their parent(s) and temporarily placed in the home of a caregiver.

Why is this important?

- Communities need to be aware of this growing trend so they can be prepared to meet the challenges that will arise.
- The needs of each grandparent caring for a child will vary from one to the next and program innovations must take this into consideration for the success of the family.

What is Pennsylvania doing about this important issue?

The Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP) allows the Pennsylvania Department of Aging to provide aid to those who find themselves in a kinship care situation. For more information on how the FCSP may be able to help you, contact your local Area Agency on Aging.

Care Giving for a Young Child and Your Relationships With Others

Changes and the Effects on Relationships with Others

Becoming a caregiver may happen suddenly and it is often very difficult to adjust to the changes that occur. The extra time that is needed often means spending less time and attention on other people in your life. It is common for caregivers and their friends to feel they no longer share common interests with each other. Both may feel some discomfort having children with them in certain social situations. In spite of these changes, there are ways to maintain healthy relationships.

Relationship with the Parents of the Child(ren) in Your Care

When a grandparent or other relative suddenly must become the parent, there are often profound feelings of disappointment and even anger toward the irresponsible behavior of the parent. Such feelings can often lead to a strained relationship between the caregiver and the parent. Obviously this is typically not in the best interests of the child, particularly if there is going to be an ongoing relationship with their parent(s).

If you are a kinship care provider where the parent(s) of the children are still somewhere in the picture:

- Consider establishing ground rules that will work out for you, the child and the parent. This will allow you to set clear limits, establish expectations and clarify what you will accept and will not accept.
- Don't be afraid to show feelings of compassion toward the parent for missing out on the joys of parenting their own child. Though they may not show it, he/she is probably not happy or proud of his/her behavior.
- When you feel the parent can't be trusted, keep a written log of their behavior to possibly establish patterns. If the parent does anything to hurt you or the child, do not hesitate to call the 24-hour elder abuse hotline at 1-800-490-8505.
- Avoid being a messenger between the parent and child.

Relationships with Children in Your Care

It is normal for children to miss their parents and want to be taken care of by them. Find ways for them to constructively express their feelings of anger or hurt.

- If you're comfortable with the idea, talk with them about how they feel. If they seem uncomfortable talking to you, don't take it personally. Ask if they would like to talk to someone else. Maybe a school counselor. All in all, assure them that you are there when they are ready.
- Help the child adjust to the present situation by talking realistically with them about what is happening now, avoid making disrespectful comments

about the absent parent. Let the child know it's OK not to like what their parent is doing and still love the parent. It's also OK to be unsure about their feelings for the parent.

- Regardless of how you feel about the child's parent, never talk about the parent disrespectfully in front of the child.

Relationships with Spouse or Partner

Strong relationships take a lot of work. Taking on the responsibility of a child should be planned together.

- Remember the little things that show you care, such as hugs and kisses, a "Thank You," and let your spouse or partner know when you're in need of that extra hug.
- Set aside "couple time." When the time is right, get a babysitter and indulge in something you did before children. Attend a retreat or other activity designed for kinship care providers and the children in their care.

Relationships with Extended Family and Friends

Extended family members, such as adult children or even other grandparents, may feel jealous of the time and attention given to the children in your care.

- As soon as is possible, let the family know what your new situation is and be honest about your needs. Let them know you will need to plan your time more strictly and to give you as much notice as possible to attend family events.
- In return, give attention to extended family members by remembering them with cards, e-mail or telephone calls. If they live close, invite them over for a family dinner or another activity that promotes family togetherness.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren/ Kinship Care Support Groups

Benefits of Belonging to a Support Group

Support groups are beneficial to families, because:

- They can help reduce caregiver stress, improving overall health and resulting in greater physical and emotional stability for caregivers and those in their care.
- No matter the situation, just knowing there are others experiencing the same thing is very helpful.

Organizing a Support Group

Here are some helpful pointers on how to start your own kinship care support group if none exist in your area:

- ✓ Gather information about other kinds of support groups; if possible, call and ask permission to attend a meeting to watch, ask questions and borrow ideas.
- ✓ Assess the need in your community. Talk with the decision makers at your local schools, preschools and day cares and get them to agree to distribute a short survey that gathers information about kinship care families in your area. (See sample survey on page 7)
- ✓ Develop ground rules by which you will run your meeting so that everyone will know what to expect without apprehension. Confidentiality of discussions is an example.
- ✓ Decide if you want an open meeting or an educational meeting with speakers who can educate about caregiver needs. Often it is a good idea to have an open coffee and/or pizza meeting and let the group participate in developing the organization. Be flexible.
- ✓ Find a convenient and safe meeting place for a one- to two-hour meeting, such as a library, community center, church or synagogue, hospital, social service agency, YMCA/YWCA, bank, or fraternal organization.
- ✓ Contact human service professionals who work with older adults, families or children as well as school officials and make them aware of your support group. Ask them to refer families to your organization.
- ✓ Publicize meetings through posters, flyers, announcements or letters-to-the-editor in newspapers. Place them where you go and you are likely to find other caregivers in the same position as you.

At Your First Meeting...

- ✓ Keep it simple and start small; two or three people make a fine conversation. Allow one to two hours for the meeting. If possible, let the group participate in planning ahead for the time, length and place of future meetings.

- ✓ Introduce yourself, share your story and invite others to share theirs. However, keep in mind that some participants might not yet be comfortable sharing their story.
- ✓ Place a notebook by the entrance to the meeting and invite everyone to write down their name, phone number and e-mail address for emergency cancellations. Ask if you can share the information with the group as a support tree.
- ✓ Ask for volunteers to help plan and run future meetings.

Other Things to Consider...

- ✓ Plan your meeting schedule – at least monthly is recommended.
- ✓ Decide how you will handle any group expenses. How will refreshments be provided? Will dues be necessary?
- ✓ Create a plan for childcare or teen activities.
- ✓ Remember to celebrate the triumphs and the rewards of raising children, as well as to discuss the challenges.

Sample Survey:

1. Are you a grandparent or relative caring for a young child?
 1. yes
 2. no

2. If yes, would you benefit from being part of a support group to talk about your caregiving responsibilities?
 1. yes
 2. no

3. What time of day would be better for you to meet?
 1. morning
 2. afternoon
 3. evening

4. What day would be best for you to meet?
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday or Sunday

5. List any issues you feel would be important to discuss:

Please return your completed survey to:

Innovative Program Ideas for Grandparents and Other Kindship Caregivers Raising Children

- The NEPA Intergenerational Coalition meets every fourth Thursday of the month at 2 p.m. to discuss grandparents raising grandchildren issues. The meetings are held at the Pittston Memorial Library. They also hold an annual conference for grandparents raising grandchildren.
- Catholic Services holds monthly meetings in Wilkes-Barre. Please call ahead to Joan Gower at 570-455-1521 extension 331. These meetings are held on the 2nd Monday of the month from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at 33 E. Northampton St. in Wilkes-Barre. Childcare is available.
- If you are a grandparent raising a grandchild and need information, please contact:

Howard J. Grossman, AICP
Pittston Memorial Library
47 Broad Street
Pittston, PA 18640
570-262-3443

- Visit my website to stay updated on new legislation or for information on grandparents raising grandchildren: www.pahouse.com/Pashinski/Grandparents.

Grandparent and Kinship Care Legal Issues

Kinship care providers are often faced with a complicated set of legal issues, particularly when they do not have legal custody of the children. The following is a list of current kinship care laws in Pennsylvania and where families can go for help. It is important to keep in mind, however, that laws and policies change and are subject to different interpretations. These general descriptions are not intended as legal advice in any particular situation.

Pennsylvania State Laws and Policies

In addition to the state's child guardianship and custody laws, the following laws may be helpful to kinship caregivers:

Medical Consent (11 PA Cons. Stat. §§ 2511-2513): This law allows a child's legal guardian/custodian to permit a relative or family friend to consent to medical, surgical, dental, developmental, mental health or other treatment for the child.

Standby Guardianship (23 PA Cons. Stat. §§ 5601-5612): This law allows a parent or legal guardian to authorize a co-guardian to assume the care of the person or property for a child upon the parent's incapacity, debilitation, or consent. A custodial parent or legal guardian may designate a standby guardian by means of written consent unless the child has another parent or adoptive parent: (1) whose parental rights have NOT been terminated or relinquished; (2) whose whereabouts are known; and (3) who is willing and able to carry out the day-to-day child-care decisions concerning the child.

Pennsylvania requires kin be considered first when an out-of-home placement is sought for a child under the Department of Public Welfare's care. In terms of licensing for kinship foster parents, the same approval standards must be met. Also, grandparents and kinship caregivers can receive the same foster care payment rate as their non-kin foster parents in their county.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren – Finding Help When You Need It

Although each community varies, available resources may include governmental agencies, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, and other entities that are designed to provide assistance to people in need. If you are over 60, access to these resources begins with calling your local Area Agency on Aging. Caregivers under 60 can call the Free Statewide Phone Numbers for Getting Help.

Be organized

Make a separate folder for each child. Write the child's date of birth, Social Security number, health care information and important telephone numbers on the inside of the folder. Use this folder to store all your notes and records about the child. Include, for example, last known addresses of the child's parents.

Do your homework

- Find out as much information about an agency as possible. Learn what services the agency provides, how to apply for services, and what information and documents will be needed. Learn who is in charge of the services you need.
- Make a written agenda of your questions and what you want to learn. Review the list just before you talk with the person. Write down all the answers and check off each item as you go.

Be persistent

There are no wrong doors. If you call an agency that doesn't offer what you are looking for or what you need, this is your opportunity to ask for referrals. Keep notes and documents of who you talked to and what they told you to do next.

- Request the names and phone numbers of other organizations that may help. Don't give up. If you call a referral and find out that person is no longer there, simply ask for the person who took their place.
- If you are not satisfied with the progress you are making, ask to speak to a supervisor if you can. Document that your efforts to go through the proper channels have been unsuccessful.

Don't isolate yourself

Friends, family, neighbors, church members, etc. can be powerful sources of support. If they are not able to help, they may know someone who can. Make contact with others via support groups.

Keep your own records

Although agencies are required to keep records, you should keep your own copies.

- Keep records of the dates and times you make phone calls. Note if the line is constantly busy, when no one answers, or when you leave a message and no one returns your calls.
- Take notes of phone conversations and appointments. Get names, titles, agency names and phone numbers of everyone. Ask for business cards.
- Write down your own thoughts and questions to ask when it is your turn to talk. After the conversation is ended, immediately review your notes for understanding and confirm with the person what each of you will do.

Statewide Phone Numbers for Getting Help

Catholic Social Services	570-455-1521
	Wilkes-Barre ext: 321
	Hazleton ext: 325
Educational Law Center	215-238-6970
Financial Assistance for Limited Incomes (DPW Helpline)	(Voice) 1-800-692-7462
	(TTY) 1-800-451-5886
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	(Voice) 1-800-772-1213
	(TTY) 1-800-325-0778
Healthy Kids (CHIP)	(Voice/TTY) 1-800-986-5437
Special Kids Network (Dept. of Health)	(Voice) 1-800-986-4550
	(TTY) 1-800-986-5432
Legal Assistance for Low-Income Families	1-800-322-7572
PA Hunger Action Center	717-525-9807
Child Care Works	1-877-472-5437
PA Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN)	1-800-585-7926



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