

## ***Grandparents as Parents Again***

Grandparents across the country, regardless of income, background, or race, are becoming parents again! Grandparents who find themselves suddenly with this added responsibility often need help meeting the needs of their grandchildren. They need assistance with the child development, financial, educational, emotional, medical, and legal issues that come with this new role. Many grandparents are raising their grandchildren because of family complications such as teenage pregnancy, death, divorce, [substance abuse](#), incarceration, abandonment, AIDS, and child abuse.

This is a growing population—1.4 million children (almost 1 child in 20) live in a household headed by their grandparent/s with *no* parent present.

Are you raising your grandchildren? You are not alone!

- One point four million children are raised without a parent present (1 child in every 20).
- Five percent of American families are grandparent/grandchild families.
- Ten percent of all grandparents are raising grandchildren.
- Four million children live in a household headed by a grandparent.
- The number of children only in day care with a grandparent continues to escalate.

### **Gifts**

There are several gifts children bring into our lives. Welcome these gifts and encourage them in your relationship with your grandchildren:

- Energy
- Optimism
- Laughter
- Activity
- Love
- Youthfulness
- Satisfaction

Some characteristics you as a grandparent bring to the relationship include:

- Maturity
- Unique wisdom that comes from years of experiences
- Stability
- Family roots

### **Challenges**

There are also challenges that come with raising children again. You must be aware of these challenges and address them accordingly.

- Feelings of shock and sadness
- Less energy
- Financial obligation
- Behavior problems
- [Legal help](#)
- Parent involvement

Grandparents experienced in raising their grandchildren advise others of the importance of balancing time for self with time for family. They emphasize the need to continue adult friendships, the need to have a quiet time for themselves each day, and the need to participate in activities and hobbies of interest.

## You can't do everything.

Takas (1995) cites in her book, *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*, "caring for your grandchildren is hard work. You can't do everything. All you can do is your best..."

- *Can't* keep grandchild from feeling sad or angry. You *can* offer your grandchild care and understanding, and help finding counseling if needed.
- *Can't* make grandchild a better student overnight. You *can* help with homework, read together, limit television, and work with your grandchild's school.
- *Can't* make grandchild's parents better. You *can* suggest treatment programs or other services that might offer them encouragement and [assistance](#).
- *Can't* do everything right any more than any parent can. You *can* get services and supports to help you do your best with all the challenges.

There is relief in knowing that you can't—and need not—do everything. You can take pride in doing your best.

## Legal Relationships

Relationships recognized in a court of law are adoption, guardianship, certification as a foster parent, and powers of attorney. Custody agreements vary on the degree to which a grandparent wants to be involved in the discipline, physical and financial care, and educational process of the child. It is important for grandparents to understand the legal and financial implications of these relationships:

- *Adoption* means all rights and obligations of the child's parents are terminated. This is often a difficult decision because a grandparent must admit that their child is an unfit parent.
- *Guardianship* may be either permanent or temporary.
- *Certification as a foster parent* qualifies the caregiver for financial benefits on a level with other foster parents.
- *Powers of attorney* allow grandparents only to make decisions regarding the grandchildren. They do not transfer legal custody.

## Understand Your Support Systems

Grandparents may not be solely responsible from a legal and financial standpoint in raising their grandchildren; therefore, they may be faced with many challenges. The legal status of the arrangement often can cause problems from being eligible for assistance to enrolling a grandchild in school. Grandparents may be able to receive Social Security Retirement Benefits, if they have legal custody of grandchildren under the age of 18. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) may be available if the family income and resources fall within the guidelines.

Another key issue for grandparents is finding health insurance coverage for the grandchildren. Grandparents who are retired and on Medicare may need to buy an individual policy, which can be expensive. Medicaid may be an option for those who qualify. Grandparents who are still working may find their employer-provided health insurance is unavailable for children in kinship care arrangements. Help is available; however, grandparents need to learn how to work with the public systems in their local community. Support groups, in which grandparents can talk to other grandparents raising grandchildren can provide valuable moral and informational support.

## There Is Help!

Seek assistance from

- Support groups
- Web sites
- Social services
- Legal services
- Relatives
- Government programs

Watching a child you love struggle with the pain of past hurts may be one of life's hardest tasks. But it's also an opportunity to help.

## References

1. Mader, S. (1998, Au). Understand your support systems. *Family Tapestry*, Ohio State University Extension.
2. Smith, A. (1998, Au). Investing in family. *Family Tapestry*, Ohio State University Extension.
3. Takas, M. (1995). *Grandparents raising grandchildren*, Brookdale Foundation Group.

## Additional Resources

**The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)** has developed a Grandparents Information Center Information packet offering the following five publications:

- *Starting a Support Group*. Shares helpful information on organizing a support group for grandparents raising grandchildren.
- *Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren, What to Consider and Where to Find Help*. Discusses legal, financial, child care, medical care, education, psychological and emotional issues for grandchildren and self-care for grandparents.
- *Raising Healthy Grandchildren*. Presents information on health screening, immunizations, nutrition, lead poisoning, SIDS, and emotional health.
- *Welfare Reform and Your Family*. Suggests questions to ask about Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TAFN) program.
- *GIC Fact Sheet*. The Grandparent Information Center mission and some statistics.

Single copies of publications are free and can be ordered by contacting the Grandparent Information Center, AARP, 601 E Street NW, Washington, DC, 20049 (202) 434-2296.

Nolan, J.E. (n.d.). *Grandparents as parents again*. Retrieved February 4, 2013, from the Ohio State University Extension Web site: <http://ohioline.osu.edu>