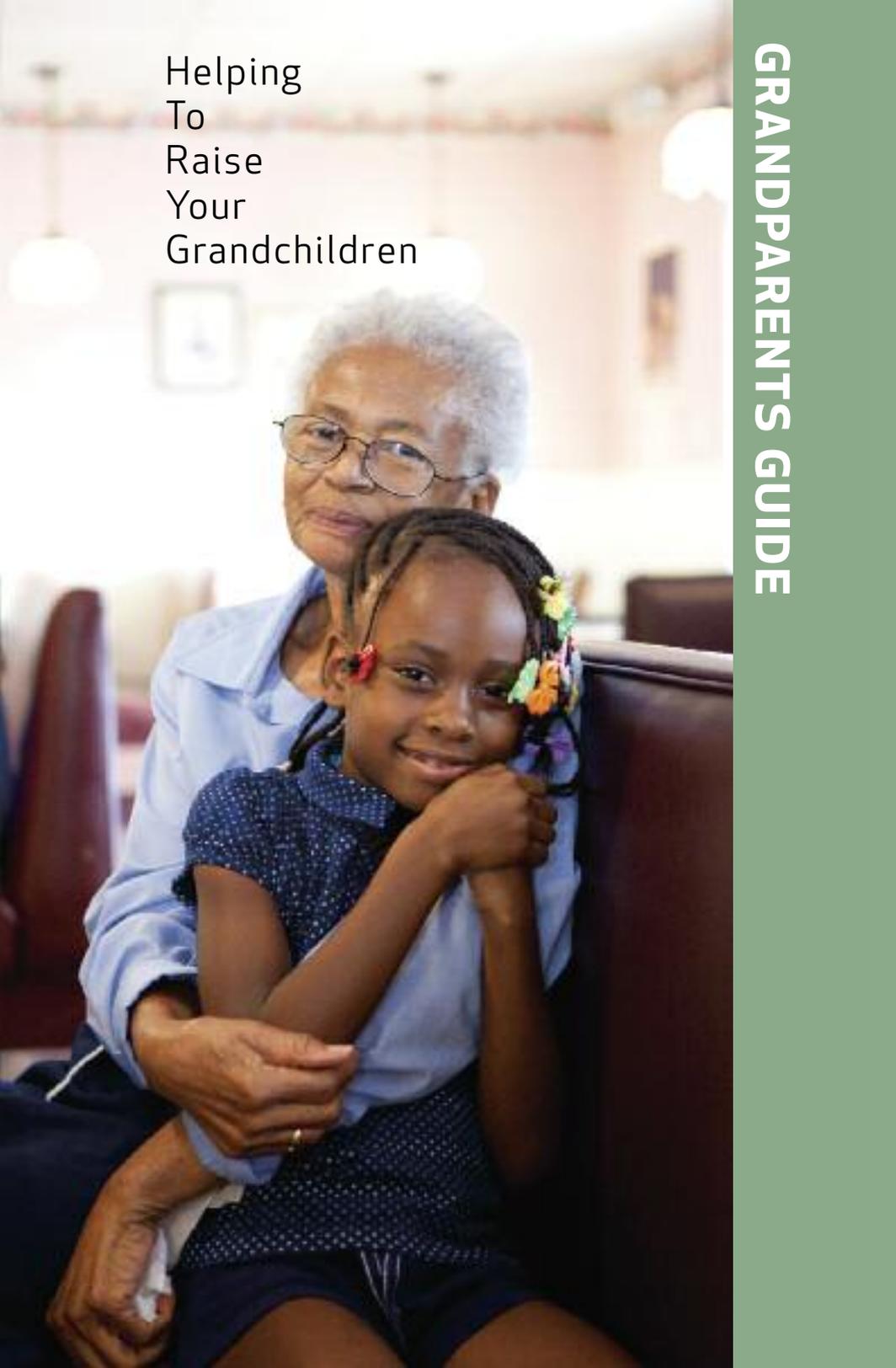


Helping  
To  
Raise  
Your  
Grandchildren

**GRANDPARENTS GUIDE**



## Our Mission

To promote health and well-being through a broad range of services to homebound adults, caregivers, faith communities, and grandparents raising grandchildren.

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More and more grandparents from all socio-economic and ethnic groups are becoming primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Grandparents are often unprepared and ill-equipped to assume these new responsibilities.

To help make the task easier, it is important to know the physical and emotional needs of children as they grow, and the legal options and community resources available to grandparents raising grandchildren.

This booklet will help to serve as a guide for grandparent caregivers. It is also a reminder that those who care for others can do a better job if they pay attention to their own needs.

This guide explores a variety of topics which can help the grandparent caregiver as well as enhance the lives of grandchildren in their care.

## GENERAL CONCERNS

When grandparents care for their grandchildren, many questions come to mind:

What kind of physical care is needed for a growing child? Immunizations? Type of doctor? How can a child receive medical care if a grandparent has limited funds? What type of custody should a grandparent caregiver obtain? What is normal behavior for a growing child? Where is help available for an emotionally troubled child? Should teachers and school counselors be advised of a child's family situation? How should a child and/or grandparent deal with feelings of anger, rejection and resentment? What can a grandparent caregiver do to meet a child's needs and also make time for him/herself?



None of these questions can be answered easily and solutions will vary according to the individual situation. When a grandparent assumes responsibility for a grandchild, it creates stresses that may affect everyone involved. These stresses include physical, legal, financial, and emotional issues.

## PHYSICAL STRESS

Nationally, the average age of grandparents raising grandchildren is 55. However, many grandparents in their 70's and beyond have responsibilities for grandchildren. The energy level of children can be tiring for people of any age. If grandparents are experiencing physical difficulties of their own, raising a grandchild can be especially taxing. Add general housekeeping activities such as cleaning, laundry, shopping

and meal preparation to the mix and the physical stresses may appear overwhelming.

Babies and younger children present another set of challenges. Lifting, changing, bathing, and feeding may require considerable strength and agility. Grandparents must be certain to get proper nutrition and sufficient rest.

## FINANCIAL AND LEGAL STRESS

The care of grandchildren has many financial dimensions. For services that cannot be provided by family members i.e.: medical, pharmaceutical, therapeutic, etc., decisions need to be made as to where services will be secured and who will pay for them. Many grandparents are retired and living on fixed incomes. Often they do not receive financial support from the child's parents. Grandparents subsidize daily living expenses as far as they are able, but insurance, food, clothing, and education can create significant financial burdens for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Legal issues are another source of stress. There are three common types of custody: legal custody, guardianship, and adoption. Grandparents must decide which of these would be the most appropriate for them and their grandchildren. Delicate family problems can place burdens on family relationships when legal issues must be addressed. If no form of legal custody exists, grandparents need a power of attorney so that they may obtain medical help for their grandchildren. When formal custody becomes necessary, grandparents may wish to hire an attorney who will handle the details. Legal issues can create financial burdens and increase emotional tensions in the family.



Early years are important for proper growth and development. When grandparents assume responsibility for their grandchildren, they need to know the ways in which good health habits can contribute to the success of these children in later life.

If the children need special care, grandparents may be required to seek professionals whose expertise can help with these special needs. The following chapter provides grandparents with information on how to raise a physically healthy child.

## HOW A CHILD DEVELOPS

**2 YEARS:** Although 2-year-olds may have temper tantrums, they enjoy rhyming, doing things alone and trying out two-word sentences. They tend to think out loud, play with toys by themselves, and protect their things carefully. They need lots of hugging and positive reinforcement.

**3 YEARS:** They are gaining physical coordination and psychological control. Toilet training is easier because they have better bladder control. They are ready to learn simple games. They express feelings better, share their possessions more and solve problems by doing things such as counting out loud on their fingers. Nightmares can be common at three.

**4 YEARS:** By age four, many children feel accomplished and confident. They think in a more organized way and often show their expanding imaginations by making up stories. They know about 1,000 words and put together more complex thoughts and sentences. They start to understand the relationships involved in size, numbers and time, and relate better to others.

**5 YEARS:** At this stage, children like to work in a logical fashion, performing an activity in a sequence rather than skipping around. They handle greater amounts of information and think more in their minds rather than talk through problems aloud. They are less focused and may surprise you with their sense of humor.

**6 YEARS:** Six is a transition age when a child may be combative, frustrated, over-demanding, indecisive and prone to nightmares. Six year-olds are strengthening their ability to solve problems internally. They are anticipating actions rather than just reacting to situations. They learn about what is right and wrong and tend to go to the extremes with emotions and physical actions.

**7 YEARS:** This is a reflective age. Children may seem almost withdrawn or self-absorbed, but they're becoming good listeners, concentrate well and do not like to be bothered when doing something. They're becoming sensitive to others and others' opinions.

**8 YEARS:** Children at eight are opening up to people and events around them. They are actively curious about the world and do things energetically and impulsively. They show affection for parents and are learning about fairness. They have a growing sexual curiosity.

**9 YEARS:** Nine year olds are more independent and self-reliant, wanting to test themselves intellectually and focus on tasks. They like to learn facts, rules and standards and are ready to be more responsible and help younger brothers and sisters. A wide variation in physical and emotional development is apparent. Thus, it is difficult to characterize the typical nine year old.

This information on child development is meant to help you understand a child's behavior and recognize various developmental milestones. It is important to understand that children being raised by grandparents may have undergone emotional or physical traumas and their behavior patterns may be quite different. Some children may benefit from medication and/or professional counseling.

## **MEDICAL NEEDS**

Medical needs may be a challenge for grandparents raising grandchildren, because of the advances in medicine since their children were growing up. Remember that children need regular medical check-ups – even if there is no apparent illness - to make certain they are healthy and developing properly.

There are several options to consider when choosing a professional to provide medical service for grandchildren:

**PEDIATRICIANS** – have extensive training in childhood and adolescent illnesses and development.

**FAMILY PRACTITIONERS (General Practitioners)** – are trained to treat the whole family. Also, they may have specific training in the psychological aspects of family interactions.

**INTERNISTS (Specialists in Internal Medicine)** – are not trained specifically in the care of children. They are familiar with many diseases that occur in children and may be used as a referral source.

**FAMILY NURSE PRACTITIONERS** – are trained in managing common medical problems that affect the whole family.

**PHYSICIANS' ASSISTANTS** – have graduated from a one-or two-year training program. They work with doctors to treat common problems.

Before choosing a medical care provider for a grandchild, ask the following questions:

- Does the practitioner listen to you and your concerns? Encourage questions? Give clear answers?
- Does the practitioner communicate easily with children? Is your grandchild comfortable with him/her?
- Does the practitioner take a detailed medical history? Take time for a thorough diagnosis?
- Does the practitioner do a careful exam before ordering laboratory tests? Medications?
- Is the practitioner concerned about the “whole” child? About preventing illness or just treating it?
- Is there a backup person to call when the practitioner is not available?

It may be necessary to seek additional opinions when there is a serious problem. Also, remember children need to be tested periodically for vision and hearing problems.

Many infectious diseases have been controlled by methods including improved nutrition, sanitation and housing, and the development of immunizations and antibiotics. Immunizations have been responsible for the elimination and control of many dangerous diseases. By age two, children need immunizations to prevent diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, and polio.

Many public health clinics offer free or low cost immunizations. Schools may not allow children to enroll if they have not been immunized.

### DENTAL NEEDS

A grandchild's first dental visit should occur around age one, with semi-annual visits thereafter. Brushing can begin whenever the child seems receptive. Many children enjoy brushing their teeth with an adult and imitating grownup behavior. Grandparents can assist them, but by age 7, they will probably be able to do a good job by themselves. Fluoride toothpastes are best; however, not until after two years of age. Soft bristle toothbrushes are also preferable. Flossing is recommended once two teeth are touching. Regular flossing and brushing should be encouraged twice a day.

### NUTRITION

What you eat and drink and your level of physical activity are important for your health, and also for your grandchildren's health. You are the children's most important role model. They will pay attention to what you DO more than what you SAY. You can do a lot to help them develop healthy habits for life by providing and eating healthy meals and snacks.

Your food and physical activity choices each day affect their health — how you feel today, tomorrow, and in the future. Eat and serve the right amount of calories for each individual. Everyone has a personal calorie limit and staying within that limit can help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight.



Here are some tips on how to balance the food groups including grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, and protein. Think about how you fill your plate for a meal:

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Make at least half your grains whole grains.
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk.
- Choose lean protein - eat poultry and fish instead of red meat.

Choices are important:

- Choose foods that are low in sodium and sugar.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.
- Try fresh fruit for dessert.
- Choose vegetables rich in color- red, orange or dark green. They are full of vitamins and minerals.
- Be a healthy role model for your grandchildren.
- Use small plates and select smaller portions when eating out.
- Limit foods with 'empty' calories, such as foods

containing added sugar or solid fats (cakes, cookies, sodas, hot dogs) or choose unsweetened or low-fat alternatives.

Include children in food decisions by encouraging them to help create a grocery list and read nutrition labels.

## HOUSEHOLD INJURIES

The kitchen contains many poisonous substances such as oven cleaners, drain openers, bleach, insect sprays, etc. These should be placed out of reach in a locked cabinet. Many stores carry a variety of child-proofing devices to use in households with small children. Other safety issues to consider include:

- Keeping pot handles away from the edge of the stove.
- Setting water heater temperature at 120°-125°F to prevent accidental scalding.
- Repairing frayed electric cords.
- Covering unused electric sockets with plastic safety shields.
- Having smoke alarms and fire extinguishers in working order.
- Planning a fire exit route with your grandchildren.

A baby's room also has special safety needs. The crib should have no more than 2-1/2 inches between slats. Keep all cords (from blinds, mobiles, etc.) away from the crib. Never leave an infant unattended on a changing table or bed. Discard broken toys and those with sharp edges and small parts that can easily be removed and swallowed.

Outside, keep the yard free of poisonous plants such as oleander. A fence with a locked gate must be installed around pools. Guns and bullets should be stored separately under lock and key.

Have emergency numbers (poison control, doctor) near the phones and instruct grandchildren on how and when to dial 911. It is a good idea to learn CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). Contact hospitals or search online for information on classes.

## AUTOMOBILES

Automobile accidents are the number one killer of children. Seat belts and infant or child car seats must always be used. There are three types of seats for various ages and stages. Those are:

**INFANT SEATS** {Birth to age one, designed for children from 7 to 20 pounds} Infants should be in a reclined infant car seat or convertible seat in the infant position to protect the delicate neck and head. All straps should be pulled snugly. The car seat must face the rear of the car and should never be used in a front seat where there is an air bag.



**CONVERTIBLE SEATS** {Age one or older, and 20 Pounds} The convertible car seat is placed in a reclined rear-facing position. After children reach at least 1-year and 20 pounds, the convertible seat can be turned forward and placed in the upright position in the back seat of the vehicle.

**BOOSTER SEATS** {Ages 5-7, shorter than 4 feet 9 inches} By age five, the child will have outgrown the convertible seat; however, children are still required to be in a child-restraint system. Either a belt positioning (backless) or high-back booster seat can be used with a lap/shoulder belt in the back seat of the vehicle.

## BICYCLES, SCOOTERS AND ROLLER SKATES/BLADES

Children should always wear protective gear when bicycling, roller skating, skateboarding, etc. This includes helmets, as well as knee, elbow and wrist pads.



## WATER SAFETY

Grandchildren must be supervised closely when near water. It is important for them to know how to swim and also to learn water safety. Adults and older children should also know CPR.

Many cities require pools to have fences with self-latching gates. Keeping a cordless phone handy could save time in an emergency. Never go inside when a grandchild is playing in or near water. Ignore phone calls or use an answering machine if there is no cordless phone or no one else available to take the call. Also, if the pool is not fenced, make sure doors and windows are securely locked so that a child cannot slip through them.

Close supervision is also necessary when a child is in the bathtub. Even a toilet or bucket of water can pose a dangerous threat to a small child.

## PETS

Grandparents' pets may be unaccustomed to the activity of children. High voices and sudden movements can threaten an animal who is used to quiet surroundings. Teach children to treat animals with respect. A child should approach an animal – especially a strange one – slowly, and allow it to sniff his/her hand for a few seconds before proceeding to pet the animal calmly.

## PERSONAL SAFETY

When grandparents assume responsibility for grandchildren, personal safety is an important concern. Set firm rules for children on how to interact with people, especially when grandparents are not present.

### SOME GOOD RULES TO FOLLOW INCLUDE:

- Never speak or respond to strangers.
- Never approach a car if the driver requests directions or other information.
- Never get in a car with anyone who is not a family member or a friend.
- Use the buddy system when walking to and from school, playgrounds, etc.
- Call if there is a change in the scheduled time for returning home.
- Report suspicious people loitering around your home, neighborhood, school grounds, or playground.
- Children should know home and grandparents' work phone numbers and the phone number of a trusted friend or neighbor.
- Tell grandparents, teachers, or another trusted adult immediately if anyone touches them in an inappropriate manner. Children should not wear clothes or carry items which show their name as this is a way for strangers to achieve familiarity.
- Exercise caution in crowds.

Being a parent is not an easy task. Grandparents raising grandchildren face challenges as they once again take on a parenting role. Because grandchildren may have special needs, grandparents must learn new parenting skills and work with teachers, counselors, and others to provide their grandchildren with the tools for success in later life.

### GENERAL PARENTING CONCERNS

Grandparents assuming the responsibility for grandchildren can easily become overwhelmed by issues related to parenting and discipline. Society has changed since they were parents and even though many behavioral issues are common, regardless of the generation, societal changes often pose difficult problems. Because many children have come from a traumatic environment, their behavior patterns may differ from other children in their age group, causing further parenting concerns.

### PARENTING TIPS:

- Praise your grandchild frequently.
- Accept and respect a child's individuality. Allow him/her to develop at their own pace.
- Encourage your grandchild!
- Be consistent in setting and enforcing rules.
- Provide opportunities for your grandchild to experience new activities, places and people. Remember, a child learns by observing and doing.

All of this will contribute to the development of your grandchild's positive self-esteem, which in turn, promotes a healthy, happy child.

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



Good communication is important in helping all of us get through life. But effective communication is essential when it comes to raising children. A good communicator can minimize misunderstandings. Grandchildren need to hear clear messages from you and understand that you care and will listen to them.

Whether it's about watching TV, setting curfews, or learning about their bodies, encourage your grandchildren to talk with you about anything - without hesitation. When you create good communication habits with your grandchildren, they will know they can come to you for direction, feedback, or guidance. Two important concepts that help enhance communication are:

1. Children need to know that the adults close to them respect them, their feelings and their ideas. This respect helps nurture a child's self-esteem so that he/she is better able to face life's challenges.
2. Children need to be heard. Listening is part of the confidence-building process. If you listen to their words, and for the unspoken cues as well, you will understand more about your grandchild's perspectives. But remember, listening requires a focused ear that isn't distracted when the child is speaking. Be a good listener.

### Other effective communication tips include:

- Focus on your grandchild's positive actions and praise them.
- Show appreciation for good behaviors, even daily chores.

- Express anger by saying how something made you feel, not by condemning the child.
- Define your expectations clearly.
- Tell your grandchild how glad you are that he/she is part of your family.
- Have dinner with your grandchildren as often as possible.
- Spend time alone with each grandchild - even if only 5 or 10 minutes a day.
- Respect your grandchild's opinions and choices.
- Share your feelings (even the not-so-good ones) with your grandchild.
- Acknowledge and applaud your grandchild's abilities and unique personality.

## DISCIPLINE WITH FLEXIBILITY

A key to making sure discipline doesn't become a problem is to set ground rules everyone can understand. Families should agree on what is expected of children and how they'll be punished if a rule is broken. Discipline needs to be fair, consistent, unemotional and without physical violence. The last condition is especially important. Childhood experts agree that "sparing the rod" is preferable to the potential problems of physical discipline.

Children who are physically punished learn that the stronger person wins ("might makes right"). Any time you physically discipline a child, you approach a fine line between physical discipline and child abuse. Too many children have suffered from adults who crossed that line. Rather than using discipline alone, consider positive reinforcement as an effective motivation. Hugs, cheers, and good listening are great motivators, but short and long term rewards may also be used effectively.

Be consistent, fair and firm in deciding what rules, restrictions or discipline to use. Work with your grandchildren to write a contract of rules and possible disciplinary measures. For example, when a child finishes the tasks assigned to them, they can go out with their friends. Then – with your grandchildren – agree on the consequences if that rule is broken.

If you feel you might have to enforce rules with punishment, ask yourself:

- Does the punishment fit the crime? Grounding a child for a month for not walking the dog probably will distort your grandchild’s view of the meaning of discipline.
- Do I remain composed even when emotions run high? Your good example will serve as the child’s lifelong model.
- Do I listen and remain ready to compromise if my grandchild has broken a rule for a good reason?
- Do I explain to my grandchild why I punished him/her?

### **Instead of punishment, try to:**

- Express your feeling strongly without attacking the child’s character.
- State your expectations.
- Give the child a choice. For example, “You may now use the crayons on the paper or we can take them away.”
- Problem solve. “What can we do so we’re both happy?” Try not to completely control your grandchild. Remember, power and inappropriate punishment may lead to feelings of hatred, defiance, guilt and self-pity. Let your grandchild know about consequences such as the loss of a privilege if they misbehave.

- Children should be given alternatives to express their anger, such as punching a pillow. Time-outs should be used only as a last resort and should not be regarded as a punishment. Afterwards, it is beneficial to discuss the inappropriate behavior with your grandchild, reminding him/her of the rules you have agreed upon. Offer guidance and reassurance, and most importantly, remind them that you will always love them but may dislike their behavior at times.

### **BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM**

No single action can shield your grandchildren from the challenges they will face—pressures to try drugs and alcohol, playground threats, gender stereotyping and bigotry to name a few. But developing a high level of self-esteem can become the armor that helps deflect these problems.

Improving your grandchildren’s self-esteem cannot happen without effective communication, which accomplishes three things:

1. It tells your grandchildren they are important.
2. It gives them confidence to think through the consequences of an action rather than merely going along with the crowd.
3. It helps them develop values and behaviors that can help them avoid problems.

One way to help your grandchild clarify values that can lead to increased self-esteem is to use the events of daily life. For example, the evening TV news carries a story about vandalism at a local school. Talk to your grandchild to find out his/her reactions. Would he/she be angry if their school was damaged? What would your grandchild do if classmates asked him/her to participate in vandalism? Talk on your grandchild’s level. Make it a conversation and don’t lecture. Listen to the child’s answers without judging. When you read a story to your

grandchild or watch a movie together, ask how he/she would deal with a problem that a character faced. Whatever the situation, whether it involves drugs, alcohol, smoking, or violent behaviors, use simple and straightforward terms.

### Tips for building self-esteem:

- Give feedback that makes a clear distinction between the behavior and the person. "I may not like what you did, but I still love you."
- Encourage independence: "I know you can solve that problem."
- Give responsibility and expect cooperation: "I'll take care of the laundry if you put your clothes in the hamper."
- Accept mistakes and encourage your grandchild: "You got most of the answers right." You may want to show you accept mistakes by not commenting on them at all.
- Encourage your child to see the humorous side of events: "I like your sense of humor!" Laugh at yourself. Never laugh at them or put them down. Laugh **with** them.
- Encourage self appreciation: "You sound pleased with your work. You must be proud."
- Accept and value your grandchild's uniqueness: "You're very imaginative."
- Be positive: "We can figure out a solution. What are your ideas?"

### CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is a reality of life. This includes not only physical and sexual abuse, but also neglect and emotional abuse.

The following suggestions can help you be more sensitive to possible abuse of your grandchild:

1. Recognize that a grandchild's "funny feelings" about someone or situation are usually correct. Don't discount their feelings.
2. Teach your grandchild that it is sometimes OK to say "no" to an adult. That includes having the right to say "no" to degrading and demeaning talk.
3. Realize that in most cases of abuse, the child knows and trusts the abuser.
4. Teach your grandchild the correct words for body parts.
5. Teach your grandchild about abuse with the same openness you discuss fire safety.
6. Teach your grandchild about the right to privacy. This includes the right to private feelings and the right to – or not to – express affection.

Know that child abuse can have long-term, damaging effects on a child's relationships, self-esteem, and physical well-being.

### BEHAVIOR ISSUES

Not only are you raising a child you never planned for, but you may be raising a child with multiple problems. These children are basically good, but many have not had a good start in life. Often they have emotional and behavioral problems different from children who have not shared their life experiences. They may be anxious and insecure. They may have a difficult time trusting anyone or anything. They may also have feelings of instability.

Reassurance, nurturing and acceptance are what your grandchildren need, as well as consistency and discipline. Children need to be reassured that you will not leave them and

that they are safe. These children often have a low sense of self-esteem. Building self-esteem and consistent discipline will help solve many behavior problems. Build the child's self-image by using positive reinforcement and lots of praise. Remind your grandchild that you love and accept him/her. Try to maintain a consistent, predictable routine so that your grandchild can trust you and his/her new environment. If difficult behavior problems persist, it may be necessary to seek professional help.

## SCHOOL

Schools may provide valuable help in raising grandchildren. A grandchild's teacher needs to know that he/she is being raised by grandparents. Often, behavioral, social or emotional problems manifest themselves in the classroom. Working with a teacher on these issues can be a "win-win" situation for all.

Many schools have nurses, counselors, or social workers on staff. They may be able to assist with accessing community resources, counseling services, support groups, medical services, and other help available through a local school district or in the wider community.



Because of the sensitive family issues often involved with raising grandchildren, grandparents often fail to ask for help. Remember that accessing services to which a child is entitled can be a way of providing "care for the caregiver" and valuable assistance for grandchildren.

Becoming involved in school activities, if at all possible, is an excellent way of maintaining close contact with what is happening at school. It may also provide an opportunity to advocate for the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren.

Too, working with the school may be a way to meet other grandparents who are also raising grandchildren.

## DAY CARE

When you can't be with your grandchild there are several child care options to choose from. Many churches, schools and employers operate day-care centers for preschoolers. Sitters may come to your home or you may take your grandchild to their home. Many people find it helpful to take turns with neighbors, friends or relatives in caring for children. For a small fee, some schools offer after school programs for primary grade children. Shop around, compare, and ask for recommendations from friends and family.

If you have decided to hire an outside day-care center, compile a list of locations convenient to your workplace or home. Call each one and ask about fees, hours and ages of children at the center. They may have a brochure that answers your questions. Visit each of them. A center should encourage you to come with your grandchild for a scheduled visit.

The following tips will help you evaluate a day-care facility:

1. Is it licensed or registered?
2. What is the supervisor-to-child ratio?
3. What is the sick-child policy?
4. When is the center closed?
5. What is the teaching and discipline philosophy?
6. What education level is required of the teachers?
7. Is your grandchild expected to bring a blanket, pillow, or stuffed animal for nap time? Are cots supplied? Who supervises nap time?
8. Are children accompanied into the bathroom? Is there a hand-washing policy?

9. What are mealtime and snack policies?
10. Who drives and what vehicles are used for school outings?

Consider your reaction to each day-care center. What was the atmosphere like? Which did your grandchild like the most? Consider getting involved in the center's activities by going along on a field trip or volunteering occasionally.

If you choose to bring your grandchild to another person's home or if you hire a sitter to come to your home, do some additional probing:

- What references are available? Call them.
- What first aid training does the sitter have? CPR?
- What is the sitter's educational background?
- What backup measures exist if the sitter is unable to care for your grandchild?
- Will there be other children in the home? How many? How old?
- What supplies do you need to bring? What does the sitter supply?
- Is there a pool? Is it fenced with a self-latching locked gate?
- Do they have animals? What kind? Are they friendly?
- What other adults will be in the home? Be sure to meet them.
- Ask to see a photo identification, and also ask about the person's drinking, smoking, and medical history. You can't be too careful!



Legal concerns are among the most complicated and sensitive issues facing grandparents raising grandchildren. Though assuming responsibility for a grandchild may cause conflicts among family members, grandparents are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to improve the lives of their grandchildren. Hiring an attorney and working with courts can be frustrating, confusing, and costly.

The following chapter is designed to answer some of the questions grandparents might have concerning this important topic.

## CUSTODY ISSUES

One of the most important problems facing grandparents raising grandchildren is custody. There are five types of custody:

1. Informal custody
2. Guardianship
3. Court placement and/or Foster Care
4. Adoption
5. Non-parent custody



**INFORMAL CUSTODY** (when grandchildren are merely residing with grandparents) is one of the most common arrangements. It offers the least protection for both grandparents and grandchildren. With this arrangement, grandparents have physical custody while legal custody remains with the parents. Grandparents in this situation may

not be able to enroll the children in school, or obtain medical treatment and financial assistance.

Grandparents with informal custody have no legal control. The child's parents may take the child at any time and grandparents have no legal right to interfere. Grandparents may be entitled to financial and medical assistance through a government program even with informal custody if their grandchildren have been with them over a period of time.

With **COURT PLACEMENT** or **FOSTER CARE**, the court retains legal custody of the child, but someone else may be awarded physical custody. Because of the shortage of

available foster homes and an increase in the number of children needing court protection and placement, many states now rely more on relatives to assume the role of foster parents.

With court placement, grandparents have limited rights. They have physical custody and authority to enroll the child in school and seek medical attention, but the child remains a ward of the court. Grandparents have more legal protection and may receive higher government benefits with court placement but their authoritative freedom is limited. They must comply with court visitation and child welfare agency regulations. Because of the foster rate reimbursement, grandparents with limited incomes may opt to become foster parents, despite the restrictions placed on their authority by the courts.

**GUARDIANSHIP** is another option. It gives grandparents both physical and legal custody. Guardianship does not terminate parental rights, but it does suspend them. It gives grandparents more legal control and authority to make decisions such as where their grandchild lives (within the state), to enroll the child in school, to seek medical attention, and to make decisions about the child that a parent normally makes. They also have control over when their grandchild sees his/her parents, unless there is a court-ordered visitation schedule. Some limitations do exist – grandparents cannot make decisions about a child's religion or move their grandchild out of state without court permission. They are not entitled to the child's earnings or property, but they also bear no financial responsibility for the grandchild. The grandparent is only responsible for the care and safety of the child while under his/her guardianship. Filing for guardianship can be costly, especially if the parents or other relatives contest the petition. There may also be a reduction in foster care benefits - which many grandparents cannot afford to lose.

There are emotional risks involved when filing for guardianship. In order to suspend parental rights,

grandparents must prove that the parent is unfit and may be harmful to the child. It is important to note that guardianship is not necessarily a permanent arrangement. If the court can prove that returning the grandchild to his/her parents or assigning another guardian would be in the child's best interest, they may do so.

**ADOPTION** is the only secure and permanent form of custody. Parental rights are terminated and the child becomes the sole responsibility of his/her grandparents.

Some important facts:

- Court costs can sometimes be waived if grandparents can show financial hardship. If the grandparent receives some type of financial aid for themselves (not the child) they may qualify for a pauper's waiver.
- Grandparents may be able to apply for guardianship without retaining an attorney, especially if the guardianship petition is uncontested. Contact a local legal aid office for more information.
- Grandparents must show that their grandchild will benefit both physically and emotionally by living with them, and must also show proof of their ability to provide the child with a stable home environment.
- The child's parents may be granted visitation rights unless the court finds that this poses a risk to the child's physical, mental, or emotional health.

### **NON-PARENT CUSTODY PROCEDURES**

Another form of effective custody is referred to as "Non-Parent Custody." A grandparent may file for this form of custody. This action has certain requirements for filing: 1.) The parents of the minor child must be divorced, in the process of a divorce, or the child must have been born out of wedlock or

have a parent deceased. 2.) The grandparent(s) must be able to show that they have served as a parent (in Loco Parentis) to the minor child for a substantial period of time. 3.) The grandparent(s) must show that it would be detrimental to the minor child to be placed or remain with either legal parent.

A "Petition for Non-Parent Custody" is filed, which includes all allegations. The "Petition and Summons" is then served on the parent and he/she is given 21 days to respond. A "Non-Parent Custody" action is filed in family court and the outcome is determined by the judge in a trial or hearing. The most important thing to remember is that a judge makes the final decision for placement.

If a judge awards custody to the grandparents, the parent must prove to the court that he/she is capable of parenting and the allegations which caused custody to be denied have been resolved.

### **ADVANCE DIRECTIVES**

Because a grandparent's health may change over time, it is important to decide who would be named to make decisions for the grandparent, since these decisions may affect grandchildren. Advance directives are legal documents that allow a person to appoint someone to make decisions for them if they become incapacitated. Every one should have a will, but it is especially important for grandparents raising grandchildren – and essential if they adopted their grandchild. When grandparents assume responsibility for grandchildren, it is important that they make arrangements for someone to care for children in the event of the grandparents' deaths. Thus they need to carefully choose an executor (the person who will be in charge of carrying out wishes specified in the will). These forms are available in stationery stores, the Arizona Attorney General's website ([www.azag.gov](http://www.azag.gov)), or an attorney may be hired. There are legal aid offices which provide help to people with limited incomes.

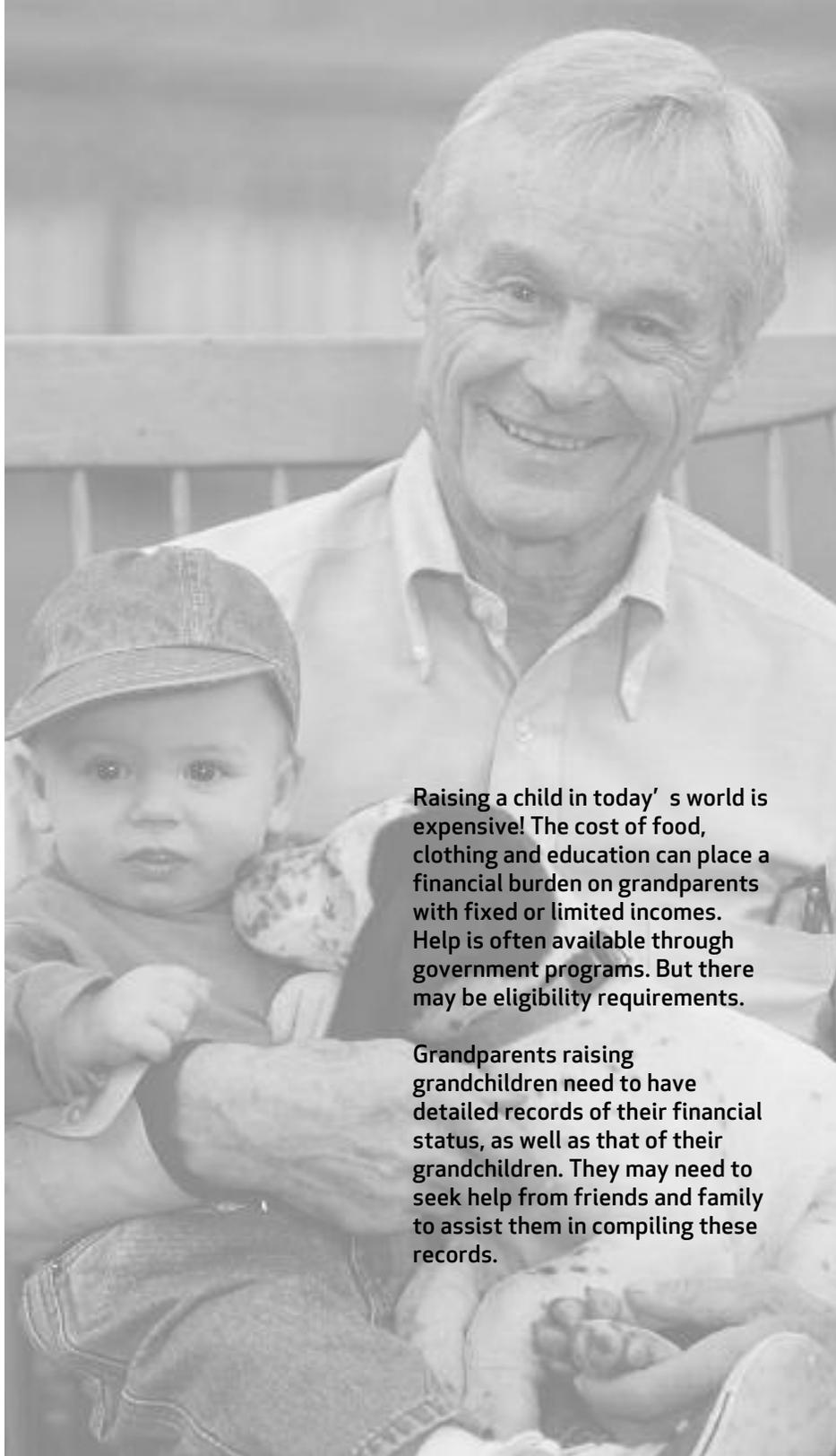
A **LIVING WILL** allows a terminally ill person to have control over the kind of medical treatment he/she will receive. It includes written instructions that state a person's

preference regarding use of extraordinary measures to extend life when there is no hope of recovery. It becomes active with the loss of a person's mental competence and/or ability to communicate. A living will provides the opportunity to state conditions under which a person wishes medical treatment to be considered.

The **DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY** (also called a "health-proxy") allows a person to give authority to another person to make legal, financial, or health care decisions on his/her behalf if he/she becomes incapacitated. Anyone can serve as the executor of the power of attorney. Though preprinted forms are readily available, a power of attorney drafted by a lawyer gives a person more flexibility. Since the durable power of attorney is not subject to supervision by the courts, it is important that grandparents choose the executor of the power of attorney carefully. It is also wise to periodically review the document to make sure that it continues to reflect a grandparent's wishes and needs.

### CHOOSING AN ATTORNEY

If it is necessary to seek legal counsel, it is important to find the right lawyer for an individual's needs. Look for a lawyer who has experience with child welfare law and custody issues. Choose one you feel comfortable talking with, who listens attentively, and is respectful of you and your situation. Those who attend a grandparent support group may be able to find an appropriate lawyer through referrals from group members. You may also call the family law section of your local bar association. A child welfare court may be able to provide you with lawyers trained in child welfare law. There are also government-sponsored law offices which help those who cannot afford to pay for legal help. They can be found in the government pages of the phone book or online.



Raising a child in today's world is expensive! The cost of food, clothing and education can place a financial burden on grandparents with fixed or limited incomes. Help is often available through government programs. But there may be eligibility requirements.

Grandparents raising grandchildren need to have detailed records of their financial status, as well as that of their grandchildren. They may need to seek help from friends and family to assist them in compiling these records.

## COMPILING AN INVENTORY

Financial issues can present a challenge to grandparents raising grandchildren on limited and/or fixed incomes. It is important for grandparents to keep good records regarding their own financial situation, as well as that of their grandchildren.

Developing an inventory listing all assets and liabilities is a good first step toward proper financial affairs management. The following items should be included: bank accounts, savings accounts, certificates of deposit, money market funds, stocks and bonds, real estate deeds, promissory notes, contracts, insurance policies, safety deposit boxes (including location of the key), and retirement or pension benefits. Location of the records for each asset and liability also should be included.

Other important documents, such as birth and marriage certificates, social security numbers, divorce decrees and property settlements, income tax returns (state and federal), death certificates, and wills (including the attorney's name) or trust agreements should be listed along with their location.

You should also include documentation as to the legal status of custody regarding grandchildren and state who is best to take responsibility for raising the grandchildren should grandparents become incapacitated or die. This inventory should be copied and stored in a safe place, perhaps a safe-deposit box or with a trusted friend or relative. It is important to review the list annually.

## GETTING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Because many grandparents raising grandchildren are retired and living on a fixed income, they may need financial assistance to help with the added expense of raising a second family. There are public assistance programs available to grandparents.

These include:

- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Food Stamps
- Earned Income Tax Credit (EIC)

Applying for these programs generally requires completion of an application form, an interview with an eligibility worker, proof of the family situation (relationship and living arrangements of grandchildren), and often a home visit.

**TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE TO NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)** provides monthly cash payments to assist in the care of needy children through federal funding to the states. It provides money and medical aid to children, usually under the age of eighteen, who have no parental support or care.

Grandparents may apply for TANF when:

1. All family members are included and financial aid is determined on the total number of family members and their total income and assets.
2. Only the grandchild's assets are considered. Depending on the state, the local department may be called the Department of Social Services, Human Resources, Public Assistance, Income Maintenance, etc.

Grandchildren may be eligible for **MEDICAID** if they are members of a low-income family, blind or disabled. If grandchildren qualify for TANF or SSI (Supplemental Security Income), they are automatically eligible for Medicaid. In order to establish a grandchild's right to Medicaid, grandparents need to prove that they are primarily responsible for the child, but they do not need to have legal custody. Apply for Medicaid (referred to as AHCCCS in Arizona) at your local social service agency.

**FOOD STAMPS** are issued monthly. The amount of stamps issued is based on the number of people residing in the household and the total household income.

Grandparents must provide proof of their income and that of all members of the household. They may also need proof of assets (such as bank accounts), expenses, (such as rent, utility, and medical costs) and the total number of people living in the household. Grandparents do not need legal custody of grandchildren to obtain food stamps, but they cannot apply just on behalf of the grandchild. The entire household must qualify for this assistance. Apply at the county Department of Social Services office. Often TANF and food stamp applications may be filled out at the same time.

**SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI)** provides financial assistance for low income, elderly, blind or disabled people (including children). A grandchild may qualify for assistance if he/she is blind or disabled and meets the income requirements. Grandchildren may also qualify based on a mental disorder, developmental disability, or a physical disability.

Apply for SSI at the local Social Security Administration Office. Call **1-800-772-1213** to find the nearest office. Call first and request an application packet. This should include a list of the documents needed to submit an application.

**EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EIC)** benefits low and moderate income working people and their children. This includes grandparents raising grandchildren. It is administered by the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and provides grandparents with a cash payment. It is based on a percentage of a grandparent's earned income. A grandchild must qualify based on three factors: age, residency and relationship. The grandchild must be under the age of 19, or under the age of 24 and a full-time student, or permanently and totally disabled. A grandchild must have lived with his/her grandparents in the same home for more than six months, and

the home must be in the United States. Grandparents do not need legal custody of a grandchild, nor is there a requirement that the grandchild must be a dependent to establish a relationship. The dependent only needs to be a biological or adopted child, a descendant (grandchild), stepchild, or an eligible foster child. Grandparents must have worked during the tax year for which they are applying in order to qualify.

To apply for EIC, contact the local IRS office for the necessary forms and instructions. Call the IRS at **1-800-829-1040** for further information, free tax advice, and help in filling out the necessary forms. Also, the AARP Tax Aide program can help fill out tax forms. They are at various locations, usually senior centers, from February 1 through April 15.

If there are problems applying for public benefits, grandparents may obtain free or low-cost legal help through local legal services, or legal counseling programs for the elderly. There may be income requirements to qualify for legal assistance. It is important not to be discouraged when applying for these programs. Ask questions and be persistent.



Caring for grandchildren or arranging for assistance through community agencies can be overwhelming for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Feelings of frustration, depression, anger or guilt are not uncommon. However, there are ways to recognize when these stresses are becoming serious and to find places that can help.

The following questionnaire will help you become aware of the pressures and stress you may be under: **CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY.**

I find I can't get enough rest.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE
I don't have enough time for myself.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE
I don't have time to be with other family members besides grandchildren.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE
I feel frustrated or angry.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE
I have more physical complaints.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE
I don't get out much anymore.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE
I have conflicts with my grandchildren.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE
I have conflict with other family members.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE
I worry about having enough money to make ends meet.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE
I don't have enough knowledge to care for my grandchildren as I would like.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE
I feel guilty about my situation.	SELDOM TRUE OFTEN TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE USUALLY TRUE

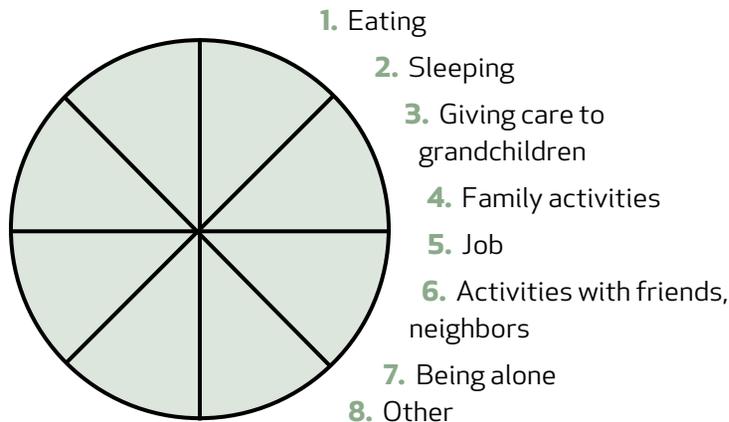
If the response to one or more of these areas is true, it may be time to begin looking for help in caring for your grandchildren and help in taking care of yourself. (The resources at the end of this booklet can provide some assistance).

## WHERE THE TIME GOES

As a grandparent raising grandchildren, you can overextend yourself with too many activities and responsibilities. The first step to handling stress is to reflect on how you spend your time each day.

### Shade in the 24 hours of a typical day:

Ask Yourself, "How much time do I spend?"



After reflecting on a typical day, you can determine how much time you have for yourself and how much time you have with friends or other family members.

It is important to arrange for child care you can trust for short periods of time so that you can occasionally get some relief from the responsibilities of raising grandchildren. If there are other grandparents you know who are also raising grandchildren, you may be able to take turns baby-sitting for one another.

Time spent alone in any number of ways can revitalize and recharge you. Reading, listening to music and taking brief walks may help to better handle the stresses you may experience during the day. Taking care of personal business also can help you feel more in control of daily pressures. There are special ways you can learn to relax which will help deal with

stress. Local mental health agencies or counseling centers can help you learn about these relaxation methods. Call your local information and referral number for names of centers.

Getting help is a sign of strength. There may be responsibilities in caring for grandchildren which could be shared with another family member, thereby relieving some of your stress. There may be some things you can't do no matter how much you would like. Learning how to best deal with these challenges will help you save time and energy so you can focus on the things in which you really can make a difference.

## POSITIVE POINTS TO REMEMBER

There are some things that can be done to help manage the stress of caring for grandchildren.

Remember:

1. That caring for yourself is a priority.
2. To know and respect your limits.
3. To arrange for time alone.
4. To arrange for time with a spouse, or other family members and friends.
5. To give yourself credit for things you do well.
6. That what you believe about yourself has a lot to do with the stress you feel.
7. That caring for a grandchild can be a partnership in which you share responsibilities.

## SUPPORT GROUPS

Many grandparents find a sense of comfort being able to share their thoughts, feelings and day-to-day experiences with others who are in the same or a similar situation. Support groups provide this opportunity.

They can also be a valuable resource. Listening to

grandparents who have overcome parenting problems, found help with legal difficulties, or discovered a resource for financial aid, benefits everyone in the group and can save time and frustration. Support groups provide an opportunity to express thoughts and feelings – both positive and negative – in a safe and understanding environment. So often grandparents raising grandchildren feel isolated because they don't know other grandparents raising grandchildren. A support group can provide opportunities for new and understanding friendships.

### CONCLUSION

Grandparents raising grandchildren unselfishly give their love, time, talents and personal resources to once again raise children. In doing so, they help keep their families intact and become a stabilizing force for children whose lives are often full of uncertainty. They should be proud of their many accomplishments.

### APPENDIX Acknowledgments

Duet would like to thank Area Agency on Aging for helping to make this publication a reality. We also would like to express our appreciation to those who attend our Duet support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren. They are an inspiration to all who meet them, and their input has been invaluable.

### INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SOURCES

#### NATIONAL

AARP  
Grandparent Information Center (GIC)  
601 E. Street NW  
Washington, DC 20049  
Phone: (888) 687-2277 x18  
Fax: (202) 434-6488

#### ARIZONA

Duet  
555 W. Glendale Avenue  
Phoenix, AZ 85021-8799  
Phone: (602) 274-5022 x44  
Fax: (602) 274-6793

Caregivers United for Children's Rights  
P. O. Box 1221  
Eger, AZ 85925  
Phone: (602) 273-0004

Family Resource Center  
817 N. Country Club Dr.  
Mesa, AZ 85201  
Phone: (480) 834-9424  
Fax: (480) 834-9340

Golden Gate Community Center - KARE  
1625 N. 39th Ave.  
Phoenix AZ 85009  
Phone: (602) 233-0017

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren  
Southern Arizona Coalition  
U of A Cooperative Extension

4210 N. Campbell  
Tucson, AZ 85719  
Phone: (520) 626-5161 x105  
Fax: (520) 626-5849

University of Arizona  
Cooperative Extension  
Kinship Care of Northern Arizona  
2304 N. 3rd Street  
Flagstaff, AZ 86004  
Phone: (928) 774-1868 x150  
Fax: (928) 774-1860

#### COMMUNITY INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SOURCES

Aging & Adult Administration  
(602) 542-4446

Child Abuse Hotline  
(888) 767-2445

Community Information And Referral  
24 HR Helpline (602) 263-8856

Community Legal Services  
(602) 258-3434  
Developmental Disabilities  
(602) 542-0419

Family Assistance (DES)  
(602) 542-9935

Nutrition Services (WIC)  
Women, Infants & Children  
(800) 252-5942

Area Agency on Aging Senior Helpline  
(602) 264-4357

**EMERGENCY CONTACTS**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**EMERGENCY CONTACTS**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone Number** \_\_\_\_\_





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