

The Changing Role of Caregivers: Grandparents

Caring for children is undoubtedly a challenging responsibility, and there's a reason that people are typically in their 20s and 30s when they have kids. Raising grandchildren (or, in other cases, nieces, nephews, cousins, and even younger siblings) is an even more challenging undertaking.

A growing number of grandparents have given years of love, money, time, and energy to parenting, only to find themselves giving those same things to their children's children.

Grandparents returning to the role of primary caregivers find themselves recreating their relationship with their children who cannot raise their own offspring. Conflicting emotions of love and resentment are compounded by grandparents' new role as the primary caregiver. How do you, as a grandparent, balance support for your adult child with raising the offspring of that same child?

Here are some ideas you might find helpful and some resources for helping you make those adjustments.

What can you do to make the adjustment easier for you, your spouse, and the child you welcomed into your home?



Reflect on your past parenting. Think about what you learned during your first parenting journey. What would you have done differently? How can you apply what you have learned to how you want to care for this child? You might also want to consider:

- Write down your feelings. Then, discuss these memories and ideas with your partner, trusted relatives, and friends.
- Consider parenting courses. The support and parenting ideas may help you care for this new, young member of your household with more ease and grace and help you get connected with others.
- Check out books and DVDs about grandparenting and good parenting ideas from [our Resource Library](#) or your local public library.
- Join relative caregiver support groups and foster parent support groups. These groups are often offered virtually, in person, or a combination of both.
- Many grandparents walk the tightrope of caring for grandchildren whose parents come into their children's lives only to leave again. How are you going to handle that?
- Keep a record of all communication, visits, and contacts with your adult child. This informs the social workers about what is happening and can be important

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in legal proceedings.

- Talk to your adult child if possible. Work out visitations, financial matters, and how their boundaries have changed regarding their child.
- Discuss what your child needs to do to grow in their responsibility as a parent. Written contracts with stated goals and expectations give you a basis to talk and to refer to when needed.
- Get to know your legal and decision-making powers. Lay them on the table with your child. In most family situations like this, it will help to get an attorney or legal advice to define your rights and those of your child who is relinquishing parenting to you.
- Work with your county social workers. They can help you know your rights, find ways to communicate with your adult child, and give you the peace of mind that comes with learning how to handle the child who comes into and out of your grandchild's life.

How can I deal with the grief and anger that I feel and all that is happening?

These feelings are universal when adult children cannot or do not parent their children. However, knowledge empowers people to deal with challenging situations and move toward peace and acceptance. Grieve and let your grandchild grieve the situation. You might also want to:

- Talk to a therapist. Therapy has helped many people discover various parenting skills to work through complex family relationships and dynamics.
- Read about grief and develop ways of dealing with it to process your grief and loss.
- And again, one of the most helpful things you can do may be to join grandparent and caregiver support groups.

Child welfare agencies are now licensing all qualified relative caregivers as foster parents in Wisconsin.

Laws have changed to allow foster parents to be certified at different levels based on their training and experience. Level 1 certification is reserved for "child-specific placements" only. For relative caregivers, this means they are licensed to care for a specific relative but not any other children in foster care. There are fewer requirements, and Level 1 foster parents only need 6 hours of training.

All foster parents will also have the opportunity to move up to a Level 2 certification, which offers a higher monthly payment based on the age and needs of the child in care. Level 2 providers need an additional 30 hours of pre-service training and 10 hours of training each year.

A copy of the current [DCF 56 Foster Care Licensing code can be found here](#).

How do I handle the financial responsibilities of this new person to support?

Find out about community resources. Call 211 or visit the [211 website](#) to do a customized search to locate and access specific community resources in your area such as Badger Care Plus, WIC, Food Share Wisconsin, and Energy Plus, and more. You can also choose a guided search such as [Basic Needs Guided Search](#) or [Relative Caregiver Guided Search](#) on the 211 website that consist of pre-selected services by category for the particular theme or audience identified to help you get started.

Tell your employer about your new role caring for your grandchild as soon as possible. Find out about insurance changes, options for scheduling, and childcare that may be available to you.

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I have to deal with the courts now. What should I do?

The court works best when you are involved as much as possible. Attend court proceedings whenever possible to be aware of the goals and objectives.

- Get legal help. If you can't afford it, contact [legal aid services](#) for help. A lawyer can advise you about what documents you need, guide you through the steps, and help you implement good plans.
- If you are asked to share your opinion in court, keep your statements based on factual events rather than emotional statements. It is helpful to keep a journal to document what occurs daily.
- Save all of your notes and documents.

I have not been in a school in a long time. What should I do?

If your grandchild cannot stay in the same school, register your grandchild for school as soon as possible. Explain to the school staff that your grandchild now lives with you. Other things that will likely be helpful include:

- Attending conferences, open houses, and school events that involve your grandchild.
- Getting involved. Introduce yourself, and tell staff who your grandchild is. You won't be alone. There will be other caregivers there in the same situation as you. Join the parents' organization or a booster club. Statistics show that kids whose families are involved in school do better.
- Maintaining contact with teachers. Please don't wait for them to seek you out. Feel free to call or email them or offer to volunteer in the classroom if you can.
- Share some of the family situation if you're comfortable doing so. This often

helps teachers understand your child better.

My grandchild is so unhappy and struggling with all that has happened. What can I do?

It's common for children to experience heavy emotions such as anger, sadness, depression, frustration, helplessness, and hopelessness due in part to the complex emotions associated with divided loyalties.

- Letting them know that you are also sad.
- It's best not to discuss the child's parent disrespectfully or demeaningly.
- Consider therapy for the child in your care. Most therapists will want to include you at times with your grandchild in therapy so that you can learn more about what you are doing that works and know what you can change to help your family function with peace.

It is not unusual for grandparents, relatives, and other concerned adults to care for children when their parents cannot do so themselves. These precious children have blessed many lives. Simone Biles, Oprah Winfrey, Kellie Pickler, Carol Burnett, Maya Angelou, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Colin Powell, and countless others have spent years of their childhood being cared for by grandparents who gave them what they needed to succeed in the world. May your gift of love and sacrifice be honored for that precious child you are now caring for.



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Resources

Training From [Champion Classrooms](#)

- [Resources for Aged 55+ Caregivers of Children](#)
- [Relative Caregiver Series](#)

Additional Resources

- [Wisconsin Family Caregiver Support Helpline](#) (Toll-free at (866)-843-9810)
- [211 Wisconsin](#)
- [Kids Matter, Inc.](#)
- [Wisconsin DCF Kinship Care Program](#)
- [Understanding the Uniform Foster Care Rate](#)
- [Wisconsin Kinship Navigator](#)
- [Generations United](#)