

The Second Time Around: Serving Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren

Note: These slides are adapted from *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Grandfamilies*, a webcast featuring Amy Goyer presented to a Head Start audience on January 17, 2008. While this audioconference does not include a slide presentation, we thought these slides would be helpful to your participation and understanding of the topic.

Slide 1

Why are so many children being raised by grandparents?

- Substance Abuse
- Mental Health
- Incarceration
- HIV/AIDS
- Teen Pregnancy
- Death
- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Unemployment
- Divorce
- Family Violence
- Poverty
- Military Deployment

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Slide 2

Benefits

Grandparent caregivers often say . . .

- Grandchildren "keep them going"
- Closer relationship with these grandchildren
- Grandchildren will help care for them in the future
- Bring joy and love; keep them "young"

AARP research shows grandchildren motivate grandparent positively: smoking, seatbelts, language, exercise, etc.

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Slide 3

Resources of Grandparents

- > Offer love and commitment to grandchildren
- > Want to keep the family together – offer continuity
- > Resourceful!
- > Have parenting experience
- > Individual strengths and abilities

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Slide 4

Grandparent Headed Families Face Significant Challenges



- Legal
- Financial
- Housing
- Health (physical and mental health; insurance)
- Special needs of grandchildren
- Education
- Child-rearing
- Family communication and relationships
- Social isolation
- Respite care
- Outreach and Information

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Slide 5

Legal

- Informal vs. formal legal arrangement (guardianship, custody, adoption)
- May need legal status to access educational, medical, mental health, financial and other services & benefits
- Legal services expensive & long wait
- Mediation services

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Slide 6

Financial



- Meeting children's basic needs
- Retirement savings & financial security
- Public benefits
- Employment
- Legal barriers around obtaining assistance
- Middle income - slip through cracks

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Slide 7

Housing

- Space
- Senior housing
- Lease agreements
- Difficulty accessing safe, affordable housing
- Legal barriers
- Safety for infants and toddlers



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Slide 8

Physical Health



- Caregiver's physical health often suffers as they sacrifice their doc appts. and meds for the needs of the children

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Slide 9

Grandchildren Being Raised by Grandparents

- High incidence of learning disabilities
- Behavior concerns
- High incidence of chronic health problems
- Attachment disorders
- Prenatal impact of drugs or alcohol
- Impact of trauma, abuse or neglect, separation from familiar caregivers, lack of stability

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Slide 10

Benefits for Grandchildren

- Research has shown that children who are living with relatives are just as safe, if not safer, than those living with non-relatives in foster care
- Children living with relatives in foster care (often called kinship foster care) are more likely to have stability, stay in the same school, stay connected with brothers and sisters than those in non-relative foster care
- Children in relative foster care have fewer behavior problems and a better view of their home life

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Slide 11

Childcare

- Availability
- Quality
- Affordable
- Location
- Year round



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Slide
12

Mental Health

Both grandparents and grandchildren may experience:

- Grief & Loss
- Fear
- Anger
- Resentment
- Stress
- Frustration
- Insecurity
- Loneliness



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Slide
13

Mental Health

- Not planned!
- Overwhelmed
- Afraid to say “No”
- Afraid to admit resentment
- Guilt
- Depression

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Slide
14

Resources of Grandparents

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Impact of Separation on Infants and Toddlers

Grandparents raise their grandchildren for a variety of reasons. In every case, even when grandchildren go home with grandparents immediately after birth, young children are impacted by separation from their parents. Infants and toddlers express their anxiety, anger and grief through their behavior. Grandparents raising their grandchildren, dealing with the complex issues discussed in this audioconference, may be challenged by some of these behaviors. Early Head Start and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start staff play an important role in helping grandparents understand and respond to:

- Increased clinginess, crying and whining
- Greater fear of separation from primary caregivers or guardians
- Increase in aggressive behaviors
- Socially withdrawn and hard to engage
- Play that acts out scary events
- Changes in sleeping and eating
- Return to earlier behaviors, like frequent nighttime awakenings and thumb sucking
- Children who are easily frustrated and hard to comfort

Grandparents and staff working with young children dealing with these separations can help them cope by:

- Maintaining a regular routine with the child.
- Responding to the child's need for increased attention, comfort and reassurance.
- Helping the child identify his or her feelings by naming them, i.e., "sad," "scared," "mad."
- Paying close attention and validating the child's feelings. Offer the child safe ways to express feelings, such as drawing, pretend play, or telling stories.
- Being patient and calm when the child is clingy, whiny or aggressive.
- Answering the child's questions according to his or her level of understanding.

Adapted from:

Levine, K. *Little listeners in an uncertain world: Coping strategies for you and your child during deployment or after a crisis occurs.* Washington, DC : ZERO TO THREE, 2003. Available on-line at http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key_military.