



FAMILY

Grandparents: As Parents

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Quick Facts...

Today's grandparent is more involved in "kinship care" than ever before.

When a grandparent fills a parent role, particularly when the parent is present, the lines of family authority tend to become confused in the child's mind.

Do not attempt to get grandchildren to take sides in their parents' divorce.

If a recently divorced in-law feels that weekly visits by the former spouse's parents are too difficult to manage for the moment, the grandparents should, in most instances, not argue.

Parenting a grandchild may require such resources as child-care, insurance, social security benefits, and interactions with other grandparents in similar circumstances.

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An increasing number of births to unmarried teen mothers, a high divorce rate, and epidemics of HIV/AIDS, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, and illegal drug (especially methamphetamine) use leave many children orphaned, or with parents unable to care for them.

Some Facts

Census 2000 was the first time that questions on grandparental caregiving were included in the census. Some results of Census 2000 are:

- In Colorado, 66,903 grandparents lived with grandchildren (2.8 percent of the population 30 and over), with 42.6 percent of those grandparents being responsible for raising their grandchildren.
- The number of grandchildren being raised by grandparents in Colorado increased from 2.6 percent in 1960 (16,700) to 5.1 percent in 2000 (55,575).
- Nationally, there were 5.7 million grandparents living with grandchildren; 3.6 percent of the American population 30 and over. By ethnic background, the percentages were 2 percent for non-Hispanic whites; 6 percent for Asians; 8 percent each for Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics; and 10 percent for Pacific Islanders.
- Of those grandparents living with grandchildren, 2.4 million (42 percent) were responsible for their grandchildren. Again, there were ethnic differences with African Americans and Native Americans being more likely to be caregivers and Asians being the least likely to be caregivers.
- Among grandparents raising grandchildren, 23 percent had done so for less than a year, 23 percent for one to two years, 15 percent for three to four years, and 39 percent for five or more years.

Grandparents' Role in Divorce and "Kinship Care"

Increasingly, grandparents are playing key roles in divorce involving their adult children, particularly with regard to caring for grandchildren. Whether it be in terms of offering temporary child care, gaining visitation rights after the divorce, or seeking custody over grandchildren who have been abandoned or abused, today's grandparent is more involved in "kinship care" than ever before.

"Kinship care" refers to care provided for children by relatives other than their parents. The increasing involvement of grandparents in "kinship care" is due to three interacting factors:

- the increased responsibilities carried by many grandparents who serve as caregivers of grandchildren during times of family crisis,
- the increasing number of grandparents who are younger and healthier than previous generations of grandparents (conditions that positively

- affect their ability to care for grandchildren), and
- a growing body of research indicating that there are substantial benefits to children from interaction with grandparents.

When a Single Parent Turns to a Grandparent for Help

Increasingly, after divorce (or death), custodial parents turn to their parents (the child's grandparents) for help. The grandparents' first reaction, usually, is to agree to the parent's request. In so doing, grandparents who take over for parents accept a daunting responsibility.

The following is general advice for these situations:

- In time, grandparents may find they simply cannot look after an active or difficult youngster, or they may come to resent having to parent again. In either case, it is best to frankly share and discuss these feelings. Explore options. One alternative is for the grandparent to provide financial support so the parent can afford competent child care.
- When a grandparent fulfills a parent role with regard to a grandchild, particularly when the parent is present, the lines of family authority tend to become blurred and confused in the grandchild's mind. Guidelines for discipline and child rearing strategies ideally should be agreed on by all parties involved.
- Caregiving can be stressful. Grandparents need to have a healthy lifestyle, continue recommended health checks, monitor finances, and connect with others going through similar experiences.

Guidelines for Dealing with Grandchildren after Divorce

- When a couple divorces, a natural tendency of grandparents is to side with their child against his or her spouse. The suggested guideline, however, is to remain (at least outwardly) neutral. It is in the grandchild's best interest to keep matters as amicable as possible.
- Do not attempt to get grandchildren to take sides in their parents' divorce. Sometimes, one or both of the divorcing parents will attempt to use grandparents as a weapon in the struggle for a grandchild's loyalty. These attempts should be resisted, and dealt with in an open manner.
- Stay flexible. If a recently divorced in-law feels that weekly visits by the former spouse's parents are too difficult to manage for the moment, the grandparents should, in most instances, not argue. They should settle for a different - even if less frequent - schedule. Generally, patience will most likely pay off in a better relationship.

Tips for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Following are some tips for grandparents to nurture grandchildren in a caregiving role:

- With younger grandchildren, read to them everyday.
- Help grandchildren practice safety by providing needed equipment and role-modeling behaviors like always buckling seat belts.
- Keep immunizations up-to-date.
- Provide nutritious foods.
- Set a good example by calmly working out disputes, especially with the grandchild's parents.
- Monitor television, movie, music, and computer use by grandchildren.
- If a grandchild has special needs, seek out services as soon as possible.
- Make the grandchild feel loved and important.

Health Insurance for Dependent Grandchildren

For grandparents who find themselves in the role of parenting their grandchildren, one frequently reported problem is trying to obtain health insurance coverage for the grandchild as a dependent. Grandparents covered by the military's health insurance for retirees (CHAMPUS, for example) find that grandchildren for whom they have custody and/or caregiving responsibility are not covered. In this instance, only when grandchildren are adopted by the grandparents is such coverage in force. Recently, several states passed legislation requiring group health insurance companies to include dependent grandchildren. Companies in some states are fighting this policy.

Internet Resources

Administration on Aging is the federal government agency offering resources for grandparents raising grandchildren: www.aoa.gov/prof/notes/Docs/Grandparents_Raising_Grandchildren.pdf

AARP Grandparent Information Center provides a wide variety of resources for grandparents, as well as technical support materials to community-based groups and service agencies working with grandparents: www.aarp.org/families/grandparents

American Bar Association's Center for Children and Law can provide answers to legal aspects of raising grandchildren: www.abanet.org/child/home.html

The American Self-Help Clearinghouse is a nationwide computerized database that offers tips on how to start your own grandparent self-help group, and a listing of local self-help clearinghouses in your area: www.selfhelpgroups.org

Colorado Legal Services provides legal advice on raising grandchildren, including taxes and health care: www.coloradolegalservices.org/CO/index.cfm

Colorado Office of Resource and Referral Agencies, Inc., provides a comprehensive source to aid in the search for child-care: www.corra.org

Creative Grandparenting has a mission to connect the generations: www.creativegrandparenting.org

The Foundation for Grandparenting has innovative ideas for grandparents as parents and a large selection of books: www.grandparenting.org

Grandparents as Parents helps individuals network with other grandparents: <http://home1.gte.net/res02wo7>

Grandparent Foundation is involved in education, research, programming, and networking around grandparenting: www.grandparenting.org

Grandparents Resource Center works with grandparents and family members to facilitate harmony and foster intergenerational relationships, providing broader security for children in the family: <http://grc4usa.org>

The Grandparent Rights Organization is a grandparenting rights advocacy group: www.grandparentsrights.org

Grandparents Who Care is an organization designed to help grandparents with visitation problems: www.grandparentswhocare.com

National Center for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren has a mission to improve the quality of life for intergenerational kinship care families via education, advocacy, and the promotion of sound legislation: <http://chhs.gsu.edu/nationalcenter>

Social Security Benefits for Grandchildren provides advice on social security benefits: www.ssa.gov/kids/parent5.htm

Books

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