

Grandfamily Caregiver Tip Sheet: Youth Mental Health



Many grandfamilies have experienced trauma or have been formed as a result of trauma experienced by the children. Whether losing a loved one, being exposed to or experiencing substance use, experiencing verbal or physical abuse, and/or interacting with the child welfare system, these experiences can have a lasting impact on you and the children you are raising.



What are the Impacts of Childhood Trauma?

- More than two out of every three children in the US experience at least one traumatic event by age 16.
- More than half of the children in the child welfare system have had four or more [adverse childhood experiences \(ACEs\)](#), compared to 13% of the general population of children. While there is limited data on the number of ACEs among children in grandfamilies, children often enter grandfamilies as a result of many of same trauma-related reasons children enter foster care.
- People with four or more ACEs are 12 times more likely to have negative health outcomes in adulthood.
- Children who have experienced traumatic events may have learning difficulties, increased involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and long-term health problems.
- Trauma can also cause children to act out or misbehave, and it is a risk factor for substance use disorders.
- COVID-19 has resulted in many youth feeling socially isolated. For children who have experienced trauma, social isolation may exacerbate their mental health challenges and behavioral issues.

What Can I Do to Help?

Grandfamilies can help mitigate the impact of trauma on children by playing a critical protective role in their lives, providing stability, and building their senses of self-worth and self-esteem. In fact, research shows that compared to children in foster care with non-relatives, children with relatives have more stability, better behavioral and mental health outcomes, and are more likely to report they always feel loved.

- Regularly tell your child you love them and will love them no matter what.
- Set firm, reasonable, and age-appropriate boundaries for your child and be aware of their progress and setbacks.
- Be a good role model when it comes to drinking, taking medication, and handling stress.
- Plan regular family fun and one on one time with them. Spending informal time together builds a foundation of connections and routines which can make them more comfortable speaking with you about their concerns and emotions.
- Talk with their teachers, school administrators, and school counselors about services the school offers for students who have experienced trauma.
- Know the child's risk level and their friends. Be present and aware of what your child is doing.
- Connect with mental health professionals when needed.

"I would always tell him I am here with you, for you, I am not going anywhere. This gave him the security he needed. I would tell him everyday how much I loved him and show him affection with a hug as often as he wanted one. A kiss good night after a story read from a book of his choice. It's not just a talk but backing it up with the words you tell your child. That is the most important."

- Tim, Grandparent Caregiver

What Should I Look Out for?

It is important to be aware of warning signs that the child you are raising might be struggling with their mental health. The signs vary widely by child age and individual behavior, but some warning signs include:

- Articulating or indicating a feeling of guilt or shame after a traumatic event
- Acting depressed, anxious, or fearful
- Having nightmares or difficulty sleeping
- Having trouble concentrating on simple tasks
- Beginning to use alcohol or drugs
- Eating poorly and/or losing weight
- Becoming involved in violence or other risky behavior

[Learn more about warning signs by child age and when to seek help](#)



How Do I Talk to My Child About Mental Health?

Talking with your child or grandchild about mental health can be stressful. If you need help starting a conversation about mental health with the child you are raising, try using some of these questions:

- Can you tell me more about what is happening? Have you had feelings like this in the past?
- Sometimes it helps to talk to an adult in your life when you're upset. I'm here to listen. How can I help?
- I've noticed that you've seemed more upset than usual lately. Would you like to talk about it?
- I know you're going through a hard time right now and I want you to know that there is help available. Do you want to talk to another adult about this?

"One thing I know to be true, you can't love away the effects of trauma from neglect and abuse. Our children need the same amount of intensive therapy and services as a traditional foster placement and we, as their caregivers, desperately need the same to help them heal."

-Jan, Grandparent Caregiver

Mental Health Resources

- [Help with loneliness/feeling more connected: Humana - Far From Alone](#)
- [Grand Resource: Help for Grandfamilies Impacted by Opioids and Other Substance Use | Generations United \(gu.org\)](#)
- [Mental Health Warning Signs in Children: Resource For Parents and Caregivers | MentalHealth.gov](#)
- [Understanding Child Trauma | SAMHSA](#)
- [Recognizing and Treating Child Traumatic Stress | SAMHSA](#)
- [Tips for Talking With and Helping Children and Youth Cope After a Disaster or Traumatic Event: A Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers | SAMHSA](#)
- [Indian Health Service Mental Health Resources](#)
- [National Family Caregiver Support Program | Administration for Community Living](#)
- [How to Talk to Your Child About Their Mental Health | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline \(988lifeline.org\)](#)

To Find a Mental Health Provider Near You

- [Finding a Mental Health Professional | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- [SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#)
- [Find a Medicare or Medicaid Provider](#)
- [Get Immediate Help | MentalHealth.gov](#)

About Generations United

Founded in 1986, Generations United’s mission is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies and programs for the enduring benefit for all. In 1999, Generations United established the National Center on Grandfamilies, a leading voice for families headed by grandparents, other relatives and close family friends. Center staff conducts federal advocacy, provides technical assistance to state policy makers and advocates and trains grandfamilies to advocate for themselves. The Center’s network includes a broad group of organizations which provide a range of services to grandfamilies across the country including support groups, information and referral, case management, legal assistance, training and financial assistance. The Center has also championed a range of successful legislation to improve critical supports and services. It provides a range of information and resources available at www.gu.org and www.grandfamilies.org. Generations United is also home to [The Grandfamilies and Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center](#), which provides a new way for government agencies and nonprofit organizations in states, tribes, and territories to collaborate and work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries – all to improve supports and services for kinship/grandfamilies.

About Humana

Humana Inc. is committed to helping our millions of medical and specialty members achieve their best health. Our successful history in care delivery and health plan administration is helping us create a new kind of integrated care with the power to improve health and well-being and lower costs. Our efforts are leading to a better quality of life for people with Medicare, families, individuals, military service personnel, and communities at large. To accomplish that, we support physicians and other health care professionals as they work to deliver the right care in the right place for their patients, our members. Our range of clinical capabilities, resources and tools – such as in-home care, behavioral health, pharmacy services, data analytics and wellness solutions – combine to produce a simplified experience that makes health care easier to navigate and more effective. More information regarding Humana is available to investors via the Investor Relations page of the company’s web site at www.humana.com

For further information, please contact Generations United at gu@gu.org or visit www.gu.org.

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