

PART TWO

GRAND RESOURCE

*Help for Grandparents
and Kinship Caregivers
Impacted by Opioids
or Other Substance
Use Disorders*



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Where to Begin When Children are Suddenly in Your Care

“ I was relieved when my daughter entered an inpatient rehabilitation program but was blindsided by the reality of suddenly having an infant to care for 24/7. One day I was going about my routine daily life, working, etc. and the next everything changed. I wasn’t prepared.”

Grandmother Caregiver, Pennsylvania

A parent’s opioid or other substance use disorder often leads to a family crisis. As a grandparent or kinship caregiver, you may have witnessed the parent of your grandchild or kin child having increased reliance on opioids or other substances and a decreased ability to care for the grandchild or kin child. You also may not have been aware of what was happening because a parent who is suffering from an opioid or other substance use disorder often hides their illness. An intervention may have been brought about by an arrest, the involvement of child protection services or perhaps you simply stepped in out of concerns for the child’s safety.

When children enter your home with little or no warning, most likely you are unprepared to provide what they need. One day you are going about your life as you expected, and the next day everything changes. As challenging as this situation can be, it is important to remember that you will never regret providing your grandchild or kin child with the love and stability they desperately need.

How can I best prepare myself mentally for what lies ahead?

Remember, “First things first.” It’s important to understand that this situation will most likely go on for a long time. Recovery from opioid and other substance use disorders takes time, and so do any matters involving the child’s custody. Set your expectations with this in mind. Try to prioritize where to place your energy as you are getting your feet on the ground and internalizing the new reality of caring for a grandchild or kin child. You are human and cannot do everything right away. Some things will have to wait. Give yourself permission to say no to some things that you may have prioritized before the children came into your care but can no longer do.

How do I begin to meet the needs of a child I didn’t plan to raise?

Children of parents who suffer with opioid or other substance use disorders often experience psychological trauma or may suffer from [Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome](#) (NAS). You are their lifeline to security and comfort. As much as you possibly can, prioritize your time so that you are available to support them emotionally and physically.

You may not have the necessary items on hand and may need help with childcare. Cribs, formula, food, bottles, highchair, dishes, clothing, toys, and bedding are some of the things you need quickly. Think of people who will help. They may be family, close friends or people in other networks such as your social groups or religious community. There may be a local program available to help connect you to supports and information. Check Generations United’s GrandFacts State Sheets for information about programs near you. www.grandfactsheets.org

Understand that you are experiencing a crisis. You may have feelings of shame and guilt because the parent of your grandchild or kin child cannot care for them. The stigma around opioid or other substance use disorders can be a deterrent to asking for help. You are not alone. Reach out to those you know will help without judgment.

Delegate to others if possible. Much time and energy will be spent collecting items and establishing your newly arranged household. Remember, the children need you most of all so try to stay focused on them and let others handle tasks.



It's been years since I parented young children, what are the basics?

Children thrive on predictability and a stable routine. Try to establish a daily schedule for bedtime, wake up, naps, meals, play and other structured daily activities. Be prepared, as a structured daily schedule may be something your grandchild or kin child has not experienced yet due to the chaotic lifestyle created by a parent's opioid or other substance use disorder.

Schedule a visit for the grandchild or kin child with a pediatrician and perhaps a therapist depending on the age of the child. Ask about having your grandchild or kin child screened for developmental delays, psychological trauma, or other concerns.

Each generation has its own set of guardrails for child-rearing. Current information on child health, safety and nutrition can be found here: www.cdc.gov/parents and www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-getting-started.html

What is a "life book" and how can it help me?

A life book binder is a collection of important information to help you manage caring for your grandchild or kin child because it will track information that you will need over time. It may contain several categories of documents:

- Vital papers including a birth certificate and Social Security card
- Health Records, including immunization records, telephone numbers for providers, such as physicians, dentist and therapists, dates of and notes about psychological or developmental screenings, and therapeutic treatment plans and progress notes
- School records, including contact numbers, teachers' names, class information, a copy of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) if they have one, and notable classwork
- Other records and pictures, including developmental milestones, activities in which your grandchild or kin child participates, and friends' names and contact information
- Diary of daily life events, and parental visits times and dates, and any observations made during and after visits may be important information where legal custody is concerned





What are possible resources that will help me obtain household items?

- Contact your local Kinship Navigator Program www.gksnetwork.org/resources/kinship-navigator-programs-around-the-united-states or check Generations United's GrandFacts State Sheets as well as other local resources for information about programs that help grandfamilies or kinship care families near you. www.grandfactsheets.org
- Local houses of worship may have emergency care kits known as "kids' bags" or other donated items.
- Contact the local food pantry for formula, diapers, or other food items. Lists of resources may be available from public health agencies or your grandchild's or kin child's school district. Shop in consignment or secondhand stores.
- Ask a trusted friend to reach out to your social network to collect age-appropriate items.

Where can I find out about possible financial resources that are available?

Grandfamilies.org has links to resources including Temporary Financial Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF is a federal program designed to help families with children fulfill their basic needs. The amount of money that a family receives varies from state to state. Funds can be a bridge between immediate needs and longer-term stabilizing assistance. The following Generations United Tip Sheet helps grandfamilies understand and access support through TANF. www.gu.org/resources/grand-resources-tanf

What is a Kinship Navigator Program?

Kinship navigator programs assist kinship or grandparent caregivers in learning about, locating, connecting to, and using programs and services to meet the needs of the children they are caring for in addition to their own needs as caregivers. They provide information, education, and referrals to a wide range of services. Check online to see if your state has one that serves families like yours in your area. www.gksnetwork.org/resources/kinship-navigator-programs-around-the-united-states Many similar programs are also included in Generations United's Grand Facts State Fact Sheets. www.grandfactsheets.org



How can I take care of me?

“ The most difficult parts of raising our grandchildren are that we don’t get to be grandparents, and we are caught in a conflict of the sadness we feel about our own child’s addiction and the desire to provide a positive healthy and loving environment for their children.”

Grandmother Caregiver, North Dakota

The stress a grandparent or kin caregiver feels during this time can be exceedingly difficult to manage. You may be worried about the health and safety of your adult child or kin, and at the same time, feel concerned about the child in your care. Opioid and other substance use disorders take an emotional and financial toll on the entire family. It’s important to recognize your need for support and respite. Here are some things you can do:

- Ask someone to relieve you so you can take a break. When a baby suffers with NAS, having extra arms to hold them for even one hour can make a positive difference in your ability to cope. Someone stepping in to play with your child, take them out for a walk or participate in any other activity can give you just the break you need to recharge your battery.
- Understand that you are experiencing a range of emotions, including fear, anxiety, grief, loss, anger, or overwhelming uncertainty about the future. A support group, whether online or in person can help. Consider obtaining counseling services from a therapist who is familiar with these circumstances. Family relationships, including those with your spouse, the child’s parent, or your other children, may suffer, and a therapist can help you to manage these dynamics.
- Rest when the children rest. It is tempting to do other tasks when they are either napping or tucked in for the night, but sleep hygiene is an important component of your self-care. Contact your local Agency on Aging. (eldercare.acl.gov.) or the respite care locator (archrespice.org/caregiver-resources/respitelocator) to inquire about respite support.

For more tips on self-care see:

- [Grand Resource - Help for Grandfamilies Impacted by Opioids and Other Substance Use: Practicing Self Care](#)
- [Grandfamily Caregiver Tip Sheet: Self Care](#)

How do I manage my employment situation?

You did not have time to prepare for this, and there will be a period of adjustment. Familiar routines are changed by the demands of caring for children. Childcare while you are working will take time to arrange. Talk with your employer or benefits administrator to see what can be arranged so that you have enough time to make childcare or other arrangements that are needed. If you have legal custody and health insurance coverage through your or your spouse's employer, check to see if the child can be added to the insurance coverage.

What should I say to others?

You know best when it comes to talking about this situation with others. There will be some people who really do understand why you are suddenly taking care of your grandchild or kin child and will support you. On the other hand, there can be stigma from others who don't understand that an opioid and other substance use disorder is an illness. There are many reasons why grandparents or kin may take in a child, so it is up to you to say as much or as little as you feel comfortable sharing. Remember, you did not cause this situation, and you are not alone.

What custody issues arise in situations involving opioids or another substance use disorder?

“My three grandchildren were ‘scattered’ when we embarked on the journey to get custody of the oldest grandchild due to neglect. Unbeknownst to my husband and me, one lived 15 minutes from me, one was in Florida and the oldest was in Virginia. The goal was to safely get them all together which we accomplished! It’s been a roller coaster ride but when I check on them at bedtime and see they are sleeping soundly in the same house I know we did the right thing. They are safe and thriving!”

Grandmother Caregiver, Virginia

Sometimes the parent will not follow through with their recommended treatment and the child may be at risk in their care. If child protective services contacted you to inquire about your willingness to accept the child, there may already be protection in place to make sure the child is safe. However, if your arrangement is informal, meaning that no authority is involved and you do not have legal custody of the child, you may need to obtain a legal document from the parent, such as a power of attorney or delegation of parental authority, or a temporary or emergency legal custody court order to keep your grandchild or kin child safely with you until their parent is in recovery. When a school age child comes into your care, depending on what state you live in, you may or may not need to have legal custody to enroll them in your local school or take them to a doctor.



You can learn about types of state laws that help kin caregivers enroll children in school and consent to medical care here: www.gu.org/resources/state-educational-and-health-care-consent-laws

A national legal resource for information about custody laws can be found here: www.grandfamilies.org

What is a positive outcome from this experience?

“Over time, my perspective has changed from having to raise my grandchildren to getting to raise them.”

Grandfather Caregiver, Alabama

As challenging as this time of life is, you will build a loving relationship with your grandchild or kin child that would not have otherwise been possible. There is hope knowing that this situation can be a positive life-changing opportunity for both of you. Your outreach and perseverance will be worth it!

***Further Resources:
Where to Begin When Children Are Suddenly in Your Care***

- [Grandfamilies: Guide to Getting Started](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control: Essentials for Parenting](#)
- [Kinship Navigator Programs around the United States](#)
- [Area Agencies on Aging/ Eldercare Locator](#)
- [Respite Care Locator](#)
- [Educational and Medical Consent Laws Brief](#)
- [National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare: Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome \(NAS\)](#)
- [Becoming a Grandfamily: First Steps](#)

Further Resources: Grandfamilies

- grandfactsheets.org
- grandfamilies.org
- GKSNetwork.org
- gu.org
- brookdalefoundation.net/RAPP/rapp.html





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About Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies

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. Generations United's National Center on Grandfamilies is a leading voice for families headed by grandparents, other relatives, and close family friends. The Center's work is guided by an advisory group of caregivers, known as GRAND Voices, and organizations that set the national agenda to advance public interest in support of these families. Center staff conduct federal advocacy and provide training to grandfamily practitioners, advocates and caregivers to elevate their voices to improve policies and practices. The Center raises awareness about the grandfamilies' strengths and needs through media outreach, weekly communications, and awareness-raising events. It offers an annual State of Grandfamilies report and a broad range of guides, fact sheets and tools for grandfamilies, which cover issues from educational and health care access to financial and legal supports (gu.org and grandfamilies.org). Generations United is also home to the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, the first-ever national technical assistance center for those who serve grandfamilies and kinship families (gksnetwork.org.)