

Conversations for Caring: 10 Caring Points

Topic: ***Grandparents Raising Grandchildren***

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1. For every child being raised in the foster care system, nearly 25 others are being raised by grandparents or other relatives. 60% of grandparents raising grandchildren are under 60 years of age, and 60% of grandparent caregivers are in the workforce. And the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren is increasing.
2. Reasons for this growing phenomenon: death, divorce, abuse, neglect, family violence, military deployment, eviction, hospitalization, incarceration, mental illness, and addiction.
3. Grandparent caregivers can be left bewildered by events that suddenly change their whole lives. And this change can bring its own grief – from the loss of their relationship with their own children to their dreams and expectations about what their mid-life and later years would look like. Instead of being the grandparents who take joy in spoiling their grandchild, they now become that child’s parent, provider, and disciplinarian.
4. Parenting can be very physically taxing – loads of laundry, changing diapers, lifting car seats, maintaining the home, cooking constantly, driving everywhere. Exhausting for younger people and even more so later in life. As one grandparent shares: “Some days I think that exhaustion is the only thing that is consistent about me”
5. Grandparents are often isolated. Their experience can be so different than the experience of their peers, their ordinary sources of connection and friendship. They can be pressing for services for grandchildren with development delays and/or PTSD one minute and advocating through individualized education plans (IEPs) the next. Such intensive responsibilities can leave grandparents little time for pursuing support and self-care.
6. There is a clear gap in the system of care when it comes to the needs of grandparent caregivers. Information about support services, resources, programs, benefits, laws and policies can be hard to access, as one grandparent confirms: “How many people are they going to refer me to before I find someone who can help me.”
7. Managing their grandchildren’s as well as their own health care can create very real hurdles. Childcare – so critical for working grandparent caregivers – can be difficult to access and afford. Respite for support and self-care is limited and must be sought aggressively. And lease restrictions, small apartments, and senior housing regulations can threaten a grandparent’s ability to raise their grandchildren in their own home.
8. Many grandparent caregivers also face significant economic difficulties. About 19% of grandparents live in poverty. Many must quit their jobs, cut back on work hours, or make other job-related sacrifices that can negatively affect their future economic well-being.
9. There are different types of both formal and informal grandparent caregiving. Clarifying the particular type is so important, since there are custody, decision-making, financial, health insurance, and legal implications connected with each type. For instance, adoption can lead to a significant reduction or cessation of services and assistance.
10. “My husband and I didn't want our grandchildren to go into the foster care system because kids often get lost in the system ... We couldn't afford it, but we stepped in anyhow.”

*These 10 Caring Points are intended to be a summary of best practices.
For citations, references, and additional information,
please contact Dan Collier at 781-586-8620 or dcollier@glss.net*

Conversations for Caring Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Some Resources

Web Resources:

- *AARP's Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GrandFamilies Guide and GrandFacts)*: www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-getting-started
- *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren of Massachusetts*: The website of the Commission that was established by the Massachusetts legislature to help grandparents with legal, education, health, economic and emotional issues: www.massgrg.com
- *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren of Massachusetts Resource Guide (2009)*:
 - www.massgrg.com/assets/grandparents_raising_grandchildren-2.pdf
- *The Grandfamilies State Law and Policy Resource Center*: A national legal resource in support of grandfamilies within and outside the child welfare system: www.grandfamilies.org
- *Generations United (Grandfamilies)*: www2.gu.org/OURWORK/Grandfamilies.aspx
- *A Guide for Relative Caregivers in Suffolk & Middlesex Counties (Government and Family Seminar, Tufts University, 2011)*:
 - www.mass.gov/courts/courtsandjudges/courts/probateandfamilycourt/documents/guide-for-relative-caregivers.pdf

Some Area Support Group Contacts:

- Lynn *Lynn Community Connections Coalition*
 - Contact: Pam Freeman Phone: 781-477-2902
- Lynn *Department of Children & Families, Lynn*
 - Contact: Meegan Best Phone: 781-477-1641
- Salem *Family Resource Center, North Shore Medical Center*
 - Contact: Marguerite Roberts Phone: 978-354-2660
- For additional Support Group information, visit: <http://www.massgrg.com/>

Area Agencies:

- *Family Resource Center of Mass General for Children at North Shore Medical Center*
 - http://nsmc.partners.org/pediatrics/family_resource_center
- *Neighborhood Legal Services*
 - <http://www.neighborhoodlaw.org/>

Legal Resources:

- *Legal Advocacy & Resource Center (LARC)*: Phone: 617-603-1700
- *MassLegalHelp*: Address: www.masslegalhelp.org
- *Mass Senior Legal Hotline*: Phone: 866-778-0939

Some References:

- Point 1: <http://www2.gu.org/OURWORK/Grandfamilies/GrandfamiliesStatistics.aspx>
- Points 3, 4, 6, 7, & 9: *Grandparents raising grandchildren, from spoiling to toiling* (Common Ground, 2.2012).
- Points 5& 6: <http://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/grandfacts-sheets/>
- Point 7: <http://www2.gu.org/OURWORK/Grandfamilies/GrandfamiliesHousing.aspx>
- Point 8: <http://www2.gu.org/OURWORK/Grandfamilies/GrandfamiliesFinancial.aspx>
- Point 9: *A Guide for Relative Caregivers in Suffolk & Middlesex Counties*
- Point 10: <http://www.cwla.org/voice/mj11grandparents.html>

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