

What Do Kinship Caregivers Need to Succeed?

Outline

- Kinship care, also often called grandparent care or grandparent-led families, is used to care for children whose parents are unable. And while we will often use the term grandparent, we fully recognize that it is often aunts, uncles, cousins, and sometimes other siblings that are stepping up to care for these children. Kinship care can be permanent or temporary, financially subsidized or not, formal or informal. Kinship care at its best helps to maintain family connections and cultural traditions that can minimize the trauma of family separation.
- Grandparents raising grandkids or aunts and uncles raising nephews and nieces is often complicated and comes with a mix of challenges and blessings.
 - There is often a blurred line between being a family member and assuming responsibility for a relative's children. Is your role the grandparent or the parent and if parent, to whom is your first allegiance—to your child or your grandchild.
 - It's also a blessing. It's a do over, a chance to be fully involved in a child's life again and make a difference in the next generation.
- Why is raising your grandkids different from raising your own kids the first time around?
- Understanding emotions.
 - Guilt, shame, anger, distrust, loss, loneliness, grief. And these feelings are often felt by both the parent and the kinship caregiver.
- Managing boundaries.
 - Communication
 - How much should you tell the kids?
 - Being honest about your needs and the kids needs
 - Putting the children's needs first.
- How to help with reunification?
 - Try to show empathy towards the challenges that the parents are struggling with.
 - Don't put down birth parents, especially in front of the kids.
 - Assure children that their parents love them.
 - Tell parents that you know that they love their child.
 - Don't put the children in the middle.
 - Make visits a conflict free zone—if possible.
 - Have adult conversations on working out disagreements away from the kids.
 - Support change in the parents.
- Self-care.
- Access to resources.
 - Support groups.
 - Not financially prepared for the addition of kids.
 - Parenting kids who've experienced trauma.
 - Legal resources to be in the best position to advocate for the child.

- Impact of the Family First Act.
- How can child welfare professionals help kinship caregivers succeed?
- Social workers are bound by a code of ethics with a set of core values. What are some of the ethical issues social workers may face when working with kinship providers? “I am a social worker working for a public child welfare agency. We are being strongly “encouraged” to place children with their relatives. I find myself questioning my ethical obligations more often with these placements. Often these families would not qualify as foster parents and most don’t want anything to do with the foster care system. I question some of the following.
 - How to prepare relatives when they resent my involvement and don’t think they need preparation?
 - What do I do if I suspect that they are letting the kids be around their parents when that is specifically not allowed?
 - I’m supposed to be guided by what is in the best interest of the child, but it is hard not to be influenced by family culture and poverty, which is often present in kinship families. I sometimes wonder if I’m just taking a child out of one home and placing them in another home with similar problems.
- How to ethically discuss kinship placement with possible kinship caregivers without resorting to “If you don’t take this child, he will end up with strangers.”