GRANDPARENTS

RAISING

GRANDCHILDREN

A RESOURCE & LEGISLATIVE GUIDE

GRANDPARENTS
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DEFINITION, RESOURCES, HELP

PENNSYLVANIA GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

In 2021, there were an estimated 6.7 million grandparents living with a grandchild in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there is approximately 1.3 million grandparents who are actively working in the labor force in order to support the basic needs of their grandchildren under the age of 18. Unfortunately, these numbers are rising as is the number of children entering Pennsylvania's foster care system.

Kinship caregivers, particularly grandparents, face a variety of emotional, legal and daily living challenges as they unexpectedly find themselves in the position of raising a second family. Many factors contribute to the dramatic increase in the number of kinship care families, including:

- Substance Use Disorder
- Teenage pregnancy
- Abuse/Neglect
- Incarceration
- Divorce
- Loss of a parent

WHAT IS KINSHIP CARE?

Kinship care is defined as the full-time care, nurturing and protection of children by relatives or any adult who has a "kinship" bond with the children.

WHY IS THIS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE?

- Various community agencies may have an interest in the home life of a child. As a result, these places should be aware of this growing trend so they can be prepared to meet the challenges that may arise for the child and/or caregiver.
- The needs of each grandparent caring for a child will vary from one to the next and program innovations must take this into consideration for the success of the family.

LAWS AND RESOURCE INFORMATION

THE PENNSYLVANIA CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM

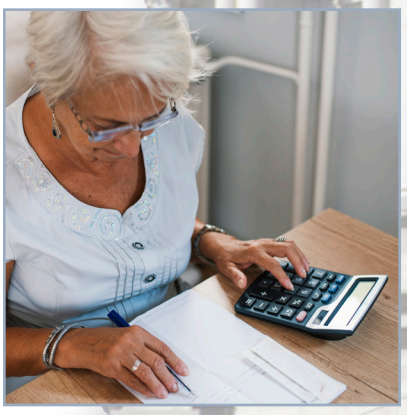
This program allows the Pennsylvania Department of Aging to provide resources and assistance to those who find themselves in a kinship care situation. For more information on how the program may be able to help you, contact your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA).

KINSHIP CAREGIVER NAVIGATOR PROGRAM

In 2018, the Kinship Caregiver Navigator Program (Act 89) was passed into law.

This law establishes the Pennsylvania State Kinship Caregiver Navigator Program for the purpose of providing information about services and support available to kinship caregivers. Act 89 requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide information and guidance to individuals who are raising related minor children. Kinship care has been on the rise in Pennsylvania and is one of the many reasons why the General Assembly passed Act 89 requiring DHS to create the Pennsylvania KinConnector website. This site contains information on state and federal programs, support groups for both the caregiver and child(ren) in their care, respite services, financial and legal aid, and educational support. For more information, please visit the KinConnector website at KinConnector.org.

In addition to the website, you can call the KinConnector hotline at 1-866-546-2111 to speak to a representative who can provide one-on-one support and guidance to kinship caregivers.



GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN LAWS AND POLICIES

The following laws may be helpful to kinship caregivers:

Medical Consent (11 P.S. §§ 2511-2513):

This law allows a child's legal guardian/custodian to permit a relative or family friend to consent to medical, surgical, dental, developmental, mental health or other treatment for the child.

Guardianship (23 Pa. C.S. Ch. 56):

Standby Guardianship:

This law allows a parent or legal guardian to authorize a co-guardian to assume the care of the person or property for a child upon the parent's incapacity, debilitation, or consent.

Temporary Guardianship:

This law allows a grandparent of a child, or other family member related to the child, to petition a court of common pleas for temporary guardianship of that child when a parent of that child has entered a rehabilitation facility for a treatment of drug or alcohol addiction or has been subject to emergency medical intervention due to the abuse of drugs or alcohol.

Caregiver Support (Act 20 of 2021):

This law updates the Family Caregiver Support Act to expand eligibility to individuals with Alzheimer's disease or a related disorder, children with parents who are unable to care for them and individuals with disabilities.

Kinship Care Program (67 Pa. C.S. Ch. 75):

The Kinship Care Program requires the county Children and Youth agency to exercise due diligence when identifying and notifying grandparents and certain other adult relatives if temporary legal and physical custody has been transferred to the county agency. ***This must be completed within 30 days of the child's removal from the home.*** Additionally, if a child has been removed from the child's home under a voluntary placement agreement or is in the legal custody of the county agency, the county agency will give first consideration to placement with relatives or kin. There are exceptions for cases of family or domestic violence.

Family Finding (Act 14 of 2019)

Act 14 sets forth the requirements for Family Finding. Family Finding shall be conducted for a child when the child is accepted for service and at least annually thereafter until the child's involvement with the county agency is terminated or the family finding is discontinued.

Allowing Minors to Consent to Medical Care-Mental Health Treatment and Release of Medical Records (Act 65 of 2020):

Act 65 provides clarity regarding who may consent for a minor to receive mental health treatment.

Child Custody (23 Pa.C.S.§5324 and §5325):

Chapter 53 (Child Custody) provides the circumstances for when a grandparent may have standing for physical and legal custody as well as partial physical custody and supervised physical custody.

Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)

This Act increases the number of children who can remain safely at home with their families. It also sets the criteria to promote placement in high-quality family foster care including kinship care, while limiting the use of congregate care. For more information, visit *pa.gov/agencies/dhs/resources/keep-kids-safe/family-first*.

TIPS WHEN SEEKING HELP

BE ORGANIZED/BE PREPARED

- Make a separate folder for each child. Use this folder to store all your notes and records about the child.
- Write the child's date of birth, Social Security number, health care information and important telephone numbers on the inside of the folder.
- Be advised this information is considered confidential and needs to be stored appropriately.
- Include, for example, last known addresses of the child's parents.
- Find out as much information about an agency as possible. Learn what services the agency provides, how to apply for services, and what information and documents will be needed.
- Make a written agenda of your questions and what you want to learn. Review the agenda just before you talk with the person. Make sure you write down all the answers and check off each item as you go.
- There are no wrong doors. If you call an agency that does not offer what you are looking for or what you need, this is your opportunity to ask for referrals.
- Keep notes and documents of who you talked to and next steps.
- Request the names and phone numbers of other organizations that may be able to assist you. If you call a referral and find out it's no longer there, simply ask if there is a replacement. Be persistent; don't give up.
- If you are not satisfied with the progress you are making, ask to speak to a supervisor. Document that your efforts to go through the proper channels have been unsuccessful.

DO NOT ISOLATE YOURSELF

Friends, family, neighbors, church members, etc. can be powerful sources of support. If they are not able to help, they may know someone who can. Make contact with others through support groups.

KEEP YOUR OWN RECORDS

Although agencies are required to keep records, you should keep your own copies.

- Keep records of the dates and times you make phone calls. Note if the line is constantly busy, if no one answers, or when you leave a message and no one returns your calls.
- Take notes of phone conversations and appointments. Get names, titles, agency names and phone numbers of everyone. Ask for business cards.
- Write down your own thoughts and questions to ask when it is your turn to talk. After the conversation has ended, immediately review your notes for understanding and confirm with the person what each of you will do.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO KEEP HANDY:

CHILD:_____ BIRTH DATE:_____
SS#: _____ DOCTOR: _____
PARENT'S ADDRESS & PHONE: _____

_____

SCHOOL PHONE/CONTACT: _____

CHILD:_____ BIRTH DATE:_____
SS#: _____ DOCTOR: _____
PARENT'S ADDRESS & PHONE: _____

_____

SCHOOL PHONE/CONTACT: _____

CHILD:_____ BIRTH DATE:_____
SS#: _____ DOCTOR: _____
PARENT'S ADDRESS & PHONE: _____

_____

SCHOOL PHONE/CONTACT: _____

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

WHERE TO FIND HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

COMPASS

compass.dhs.pa.gov

Residents can also search for benefits using COMPASS, an online tool that allows users to find out what benefits they qualify for and apply for those benefits online.

GRANDFAMILIES.ORG

grandfamilies.org

Grandfamilies.org is a national resource that provides information to grandparents as they navigate the child welfare system. Their website offers a searchable database of laws and pending legislation of importance to grandfamilies, as well as resource guides to guardianship, custody, foster care, financial assistance and contact information for local bar associations.

NATIONAL BEREAVEMENT RESOURCE GUIDE

elunanetwork.org/national-bereavement-resource-guide

This resource guide includes an online directory of organizations and programs that are available to help children and families affected by grief, addiction, a suicide death or other mental health challenges.

PENN STATE UNIVERSITY'S KINSHIP CARE LOCATOR

aese.psu.edu/outreach/intergenerational/program-areas/kinship/programs

As a part of Penn State University's Intergenerational Program, the Kinship Care Locater is an online database of resources for kinship caregivers. You can find relevant resources by selecting your county of interest.

PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF AREA AGENCIES ON AGING

p4a.org/contact-us/

Phone: 717-541-4214

Some Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) offer a Caregiver or Grandparent Support Program which can provide resources, support groups and financial assistance to grandparents raising their grandchildren.

PENNSYLVANIA CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

pa.gov/agencies/dhs/contact/ocyf-regional-offices

Phone: 1-800-932-0313 - ChildLine - To report child abuse or neglect only.

Pennsylvania's Child Welfare services includes contact information for county Children and Youth offices, local family centers, and resources for preventing child abuse and neglect.

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH/COUNTY RESOURCE GUIDES

pa.gov/agencies/health/programs/healthy-living/help-in-pa

The Department of Health has created guides for available health and human services in each of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Each guide contains resources for children with special needs, health insurance, housing and more.

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES/ COUNTY ASSISTANCE OFFICES

pa.gov/agencies/dhs/contact/cao-information

Phone: 1-800-692-7462

TTY/TDD 1-800-451-5886

County Assistance Offices can help Pennsylvanians identify and apply for available benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Child Care Works, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

PENNSYLVANIA FAMILIES

PaFamiliesInc.org

Phone: 1-800-947-4941

Email: info@pafamiliesinc.org

PA Families is a non-profit organization that offers a database of resources for families caring for children and youth with emotional, behavioral and special needs. PA Families can also be an advocate in dealing with the various child serving systems. You can find resources by searching for your county and/or the type of services you are seeking.

PENNSYLVANIA FAMILY SUPPORT ALLIANCE

pafsa.org

Phone: 1-800-448-4906

The PA Family Support Alliance is a non-profit organization that provides education, support and training to help ensure the safety of children throughout Pennsylvania. The website includes many parenting resources as well as information on events they frequently hold in different communities throughout the state.

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

ssa.gov/locator

Phone: 1-800-772-1213

TTY: 1-800-325-0778

You can search for your local Social Security Office and contact them to determine if you or your grandchild(ren) are eligible for any additional benefits.

SPECIAL KIDS NETWORK

pa.gov/agencies/health/programs/healthy-living/special-kids-network

Phone: 1-800-986-4550

The Special Kids Network offers a wealth of resources for children and youth with special needs or physical disabilities. The Network offers referrals to local resources, in-home coordination services and systematic support for families.

STATEWIDE ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY NETWORK (SWAN)

pa.gov/agencies/dhs/resources/adopt-pa-kids

Phone: 1-800-585-7926

Email: information@diakon-swan.org

Administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, SWAN offers a network of resources and/or information for families and children going through the adoption, custody and guardianship processes. SWAN offers a variety of post-permanency services such as support groups and referrals to local family centers.

UNITED WAY OF PENNSYLVANIA

uwp.org

Phone: 211 or 717-238-7365

When you call, a United Way Resource Specialist will assist you by accessing a database of local health and human services that may be available to you. These services include support groups, counseling centers, relevant non-profit organizations and more.

CONTACTS:

DATE:_____ TIME:_____
AGENCY: _____
NAME OF CONTACT: _____
NOTES: _____

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

DATE:_____ TIME:_____
AGENCY: _____
NAME OF CONTACT: _____
NOTES: _____

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

DATE:_____ TIME:_____
AGENCY: _____
NAME OF CONTACT: _____
NOTES: _____

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

NOTES:

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

GRANDPARENT AND KINSHIP CARE

LEGAL ISSUES

Kinship care providers are often faced with a complicated set of legal issues, and may require legal assistance. Following is a list of legal resources that may be available for you and your family to go for help. It is important to keep in mind that laws and policies change and are subject to different interpretations. These resources are provided as information only and are not intended as legal advice.

FINDING LEGAL HELP

Although each community varies, available resources may include governmental agencies, social service agencies, faith-based organizations and other entities that are designed to provide assistance to people in need. Following is a list of resources that may be of benefit to you.

PA LAW HELP

palawhelp.org

Email: palawhelp@palegalaid.net

PA LAW HELP provides free information on a variety of civil legal issues including adoption, guardianship and custody. You can find information about legal proceedings and use the website for referrals to legal service providers and information about your local courts.

PENNSYLVANIA BAR ASSOCIATION

pabar.org

Phone: 1-800-932-0311

The Pennsylvania Bar Association provides lawyer referrals and information on local bar associations.

PENNSYLVANIA'S SENIORLAW HELPLINE

seniorlawcenter.org

Pennsylvanians who are 60 and over can get free, confidential telephone legal advice and/or referrals to local participating lawyers at 1-877-727-7529.

PENNSYLVANIA LEGAL AID NETWORK

palegalaid.net

Phone: 1-800-322-7572

The Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network connects individuals and families who meet income requirements to local Legal Aid programs that can assist them with legal matters.

CONTACTS:

DATE:_____ TIME:_____
AGENCY: _____
NAME OF CONTACT: _____
NOTES: _____

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

DATE:_____ TIME:_____
AGENCY: _____
NAME OF CONTACT: _____
NOTES: _____

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

DATE:_____ TIME:_____
AGENCY: _____
NAME OF CONTACT: _____
NOTES: _____

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

NOTES:

SUPPORT GROUPS

KINSHIP CARE SUPPORT GROUPS

BENEFITS OF BELONGING TO A SUPPORT GROUP

Support groups are beneficial to families because:

- They can help reduce caregiver stress, improving overall health and resulting in greater physical and emotional stability for caregivers and those in their care.
- No matter the situation, just knowing there are others experiencing the same thing is very helpful.

ORGANIZING A SUPPORT GROUP

Here are some helpful pointers on how to start your own kinship care support group if none exist in your area:

- Gather information about other kinds of support groups. If possible, call and ask permission to attend a meeting to observe, ask questions and borrow ideas.
- Assess the need in your community. Talk with the decision-makers at your local schools, preschools and childcare centers.
- Develop ground rules by which you will run your meeting so that everyone will know what to expect without apprehension. Confidentiality of discussions is an example.

- Decide if you want an open meeting or an informational meeting with speakers who can educate about caregiver needs. Often it is a good idea to have an open coffee and/or pizza meeting and let the group participate in developing the organization.
- Be flexible.
- Find a convenient and safe meeting place for a one to two hour meeting, such as a library, community center, church or synagogue, hospital, social service agency or a YMCA/YWCA.
- Contact human service professionals who work with older adults, families or children as well as school officials and make them aware of your support group. Ask them to refer families to your organization.
- Publicize meetings through posters, flyers, announcements or letters-to-the-editor in newspapers. Place them where you go and you are likely to find other caregivers in the same position as you.

AT YOUR FIRST MEETING

- Keep it simple and start small; two or three people make a fine conversation. Allow one to two hours for the meeting. If possible, let the group participate in planning ahead for the time, length and place of future meetings.
- Introduce yourself, share your story and invite others to share theirs. Keep in mind, however, that some participants might not yet be comfortable sharing their story.
- Place a notebook by the entrance to the meeting and invite everyone to write down their name, phone number and email address for emergency cancellations. Ask if you may share the information with the group as a support tree.
- Ask for volunteers to help plan and run future meetings.

TIPS...

- Plan your meeting schedule — at least monthly is recommended.
  - Decide how you will handle any group expenses. How will refreshments be provided?
  - Create a plan for childcare or teen activities.
  - Remember to celebrate the triumphs and the rewards of raising children, as well as to discuss the challenges.

MEETING CONTACTS:

NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

NOTES:

RELEVANT AGENCY PHONE NUMBERS

PA LINK TO AGING AND DISABILITY RESOURCES.....1-800-753-8827

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM (CHIP).....(Voice) 1-800-986-5437

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES/COUNTY ASSISTANCE OFFICES/COMPASS
.....1-800-692-7462 or
.....TTY/TDD 1-800-451-5886

EDUCATIONAL LAW CENTER ..... (Philadelphia) 215-238-6970
.....(Pittsburgh) 412-258-2120

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR LIMITED INCOMES
(DHS Helpline) .....(Voice) 1-800-692-7462
..... (TDD) 1-800-451-5886

PA FAMILY SUPPORT ALLIANCE.....1-800-448-4906

PA LEGAL AID NETWORK, INC. 1-800-322-7572

PA STATEWIDE ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY
NETWORK (SWAN)..... 1-800-585-7926

SPECIAL KIDS NETWORK (DEPT. OF HEALTH) .....(Voice) 1-800-986-4550

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI) .....(Voice) 1-800-772-1213
.....(TTY) 1-800-325-0778

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