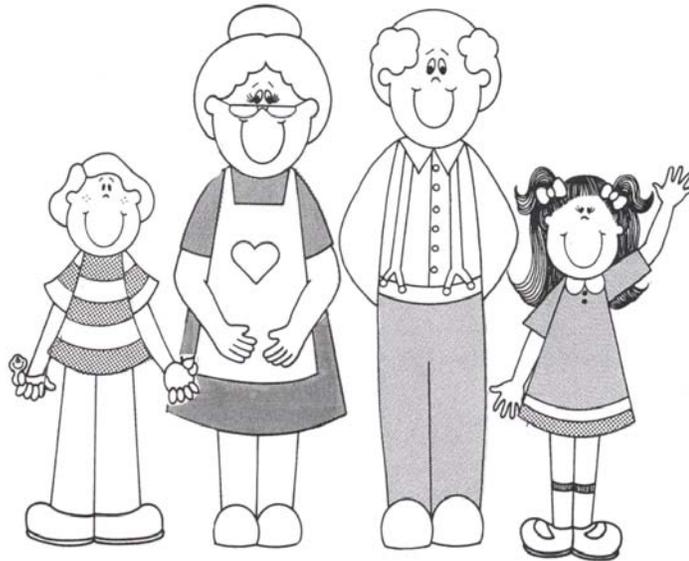


Grandparents Raising Grandchildren



A Guide for Wyoming Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren



A publication of

Parent Education Network

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A Guide for Wyoming Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren



In a perfect world, parents raise their children in their own homes and grandparents have the privilege and joy of spoiling their grandchildren—and then sending them back home to their parents! Well, it's not a perfect world that we live in, and more and more grandparents find themselves in the position of part-time, temporary, full-time, or permanent primary caregivers and/or guardians for their grandchildren.

This national situation is not limited to a certain geographical area or to any particular population. Every year more and more grandparents of all ages and from all ethnic and socio-economic groups are becoming primary caregivers for their grandchildren. The need to communicate with these praiseworthy grandparents is vital because raising children today is not the same as it was when most grandparents were raising their own children. Laws, social services and resources, education, medical care, insurance coverage, and child care have all undergone significant changes. Many of today's grandparents have been “out of the loop” when it comes to knowing where to go for help in raising children in the 21st century.

Of course, needs vary from family to family. Some need legal assistance; others may need counseling, information about child care, special services for special needs children, medical and insurance resources, financial assistance, and support groups. Some grandparents may need assistance in all of these areas. Finding help may take some time and effort, but it doesn't have to be difficult. This publication is designed to make your search easier and to provide you the assurance that help is available from many different sources.

Regardless of the reasons grandparents are raising their grandchildren, and whatever their specific needs, all grandparents in this situation have one thing in common: *they seek to provide a loving, safe, and stable environment for their grandchildren, a solid foundation from which their grandchildren can grow, and they are willing to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to do just that.*

Across the country, more than six million children—approximately 1 in 12 children—are living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives while parents struggle with substance abuse, mental illness, incarceration, economic hardship, divorce, domestic violence, and other serious problems.

National figures provided by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) say there are 4.5 million children under the age of 18 being raised by grandparent-headed households nationwide. That's approximately 6.3 percent of all children under age 18 in the U.S. This represents a 30% increase from 1990 to 2000.

In Wyoming, the majority of children living in kinship homes are there due to high levels of substance abuse, mental illness and child abuse. Other situations can include imprisonment of a parent, poverty, job loss, change of jobs, death or illness of a parent, divorce, and teenage pregnancy. There are 5,150 children living in grandparent-headed households in Wyoming (4.0% of all the children in the state). There are another 1,229 children living in households headed by other relatives (1.0% of all the children in the state).

In Wyoming, 3,582 grandparents report they are responsible for their grandchildren living with them. Thirty-eight percent of these grandparents live in households without the children's parents present. If you are among these heroic and compassionate grandparents, who for whatever reasons are raising your grandchildren, you obviously are **not** alone.

Wyoming grandparents have avenues for help with parenting their grandchildren. Efforts are under way between the Wyoming Department of Family Services (WDFS) and the AARP to provide a comprehensive support system for the more than 3,500 Wyoming grandparents raising their grandchildren.

As primary caregivers, grandparents may be responsible for the legal, financial, educational and medical decisions regarding their grandchildren. And, they may face the difficult task of gaining the necessary authority required to make those decisions.



The Purpose of this Guide

The purpose of this resource guide is to give grandparents raising grandchildren an overview of available services and programs, a general direction in getting needed assistance, and encouragement and support for performing the valiant and noble task of nurturing, guiding, protecting, and providing for their grandchildren.

This guide will also offer tips and general information that grandparents may need to consider as they take on the responsibility of raising their grandchildren. By no means is this an all-inclusive listing of all services and agencies available, but it does provide some starting points for those of you who are raising your children's children.

Any grandparent raising his or her grandchildren will ride an "emotional rollercoaster". These are natural and normal reactions to situations that are not of your making, but to which you must respond in order to protect, and in some cases, rescue your grandchildren.



Organization of Information

This resource guide is organized into these sections:

1. Emotional Ups and Downs
2. General information on developmental, health, and safety needs
3. Information on child care, school and educational needs
4. Important Questions to Ask
5. Steps to take when making the decision to raise your grandchildren
6. Legal Glossary
7. Directory of Services in Wyoming
8. Information on obtaining needed documents
9. Other Financial Resources
10. Challenges facing children today
11. Things Grandchildren Need the Most
12. Strategies for Coping
13. Support Groups and How to Get Involved
14. State Laws and Policies

Emotional Ups. . .

Faith that your grandchildren's lives will be stable and sound.

Satisfaction in knowing you are making a better life for your grandchildren.

Comfort in knowing your grandchildren are safe with you.

Gratification in knowing you are making a difference in your grandchildren's lives.

Patience to cope with yourself and your grandchildren.

Courage to take on the responsibility of parenting—and it is a huge responsibility.

Inspiration that comes from hearing your grandchildren say “I love you” and “thank you”.

Gain in personal satisfaction knowing you are strong enough for this task.

Sense of Order when things go right.

Happiness that you made it through another day.

Pride in yourself and your grandchildren for persevering through difficult times.

Compassion in your relationships with your grandchildren, their friends, and others.

Hope that the situation will get better.



Emotional Downs. . .

Denial of the current situation—unrealistic expectations that the parents will become responsible for their own children.

Fear of how you will be able to financially and emotionally care for your grandchildren.

Guilt thinking you should have or could have done things differently with your own child.

Anger at your child for abandoning or not being a responsible parent.

Sacrifice in order to keep your family together.

Loss of the grandparent-grandchild relationship, as well as peer contacts.

Frustration when things don't go as planned.

Sadness at the loss of a child and of the typical grandparent role.

Disappointment in not being able to do the things you wanted to do at this stage in your life.

Confusion in understanding the issues facing today's children.

Embarrassment at having to ask for assistance for raising your "new family", and asking yourself, "How could my child do this to me?"

Isolation from your friends and "child-free" social networks.

(Source: Illinois Department on Aging "Starting Points for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Resource Guide with Information & Services for Grandparent Caregivers"
www.state.il.us/aging)

Developmental, Health, and Safety Needs

Developmental: Many grandparents have not had to think about developmental, health, and safety needs of children for many years, and things have changed since their own children were children. New parenting practices, laws, and technology all affect the way parents raise and care for children today. These are all issues that grandparents raising grandchildren need to become educated about so that they can do the best job possible for their grandchildren.

- ✓ **Disabilities:** Children who are being raised by their grandparents may have been exposed to emotional or physical traumas, or to prenatal conditions that make their development and behaviors different from typical children their age. These are developmental issues that grandparents may have to cope with right away so that the child (or children) can get the necessary help from early intervention services or special education resources. All toddlers should have the “One Before Two” screening which is done free of charge by the Child Development Centers statewide. Child Development Centers will also screen children ages three to five at no charge. (See “Developmental Preschools” in the Directory of Services section.)
- ✓ **Substance Abuse:** If your grandchildren have been exposed to harmful substances (drugs and alcohol) either before birth or after birth, there is reason for concern about their typical development, but there are programs and services which can help you. Ask about such services at your local child development center or local schools. (See “Early Intervention Council” in the Directory of Services section.)

Health: If you are worried about your grandchild’s health, see your family physician or pediatrician for a checkup. Another option is to visit or call your local public health nurse for a checkup and for help with referrals for your grandchild if necessary. The



public health office can also advise you about vaccinations for your grandchild. Some kids have more medical needs than others. They might wear glasses or braces on their teeth. They may have to see doctors more often because of a serious health condition. Some will need help coping with the changes taking place in the family. All these health services cost money. How will you pay for them?

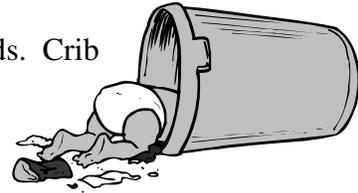
- ✓ **Insurance:** There are several places to go for help. Medicaid is a program that pays health care expenses for people with low incomes. Your grandchild may qualify to

receive benefits from this program. If not, he or she may be able to get benefits from the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Each state has a program like this. These programs pay for doctor visits, hospital stays, shots, and medicines. Most programs don't look at a grandparent's income when they decide if the child should get help.

Obtaining health insurance for your grandchildren is important. If you are still working and you have health insurance through your work, ask about dependent coverage for your grandchildren in your custody. To apply for Medicaid for your grandchildren, you will need to prove that you are their primary caregiver, the children do not have parental care, proof of your grandchildren's ages, their relationship to you, and their current living arrangement. You do not need to have legal custody of your grandchildren for them to receive Medicaid. (See "Information & Support Services" for more specific information and phone numbers about health insurance.)

Safety: Your home and surroundings may no longer be "child-proof", so it will be necessary to make them safe environments for infants, toddlers, and children once again.

- ✓ Small objects can be deadly if swallowed. Keep objects like pins, coins, beads, etc. away from children.
- ✓ Cribs need to have snug-fitting mattresses and bumper pads. Crib slats need to be narrowly spaced, and no cords or strings (including curtain and blind pulls) should be near the crib or bed.
- ✓ Children should never play with plastic bags.
- ✓ Keep all cleaning supplies, chemicals, medicines, and matches on a high shelf or in child-proof cabinets.
- ✓ If firearms are kept in your home, be sure they are locked up and left unloaded.
- ✓ Smoke detectors should be installed and batteries replaced twice a year.
- ✓ Plan escape routes and hold practice fire drills so children know how to get out of the house in an emergency and where to meet you outside.
- ✓ Children should never be left alone in the bathtub, in wading pools, or in a vehicle.
- ✓ Children should always wear helmets when riding bicycles or scooters; in addition, mouth guards and wrist and knee pads need to be worn when using skateboards or rollerblades.



- ✓ By state law, children must be secured in a vehicle with proper safety seats and restraints.

Without making children overly frightened, we must teach them personal safety. We live in a world where children must understand that not all people are trustworthy and they need to be cautious around strangers. Children need to know:

- ✓ their full name, address, (including state and zip code), and phone number (including area code). If your residence is their new address, be sure they know this new information.
- ✓ how to use the telephone to call an operator or to dial emergency numbers.
- ✓ never to enter a stranger's car or home for any reason.
- ✓ how to use a "code" word that only you and they know in case you need to have someone else pick them up. This would prove that the person is safe for the child to go with.
- ✓ they are safer playing and walking with friends, and to avoid isolated and poorly lit areas.
- ✓ not to leave the yard or wander away while shopping with you.
- ✓ to tell you if something uncomfortable or strange has happened to them.
- ✓ not to tell information about themselves except to approved persons.

Child Care, School, and Educational Needs

Child Care: If you are a working grandparent, you may have to find suitable child care for your grandchildren. Assistance in paying for child care may be available if you are working or attending school. Contact your local Department of Family Services office for more information. Various types of childcare are available in most communities:

- In-home care where the caregiver comes to your home;
- Exempt home care where providers may care for two children in addition to their own in the provider's home (not licensed by the state);



- Family child care homes/centers where care is provided in the caregiver’s home, but there are more children and an assistant or second provider (these must be licensed by the state);
- Child care centers where care is not in a private home, but in a larger facility with many children and several assistants or providers (these are licensed by the state).

Talking to other grandparents and parents is a good way to learn more about the childcare providers in your area. If you are employed, ask your employer about programs to help you with your child care needs. You may also be eligible for earned income tax credit (EITC) on your income taxes. (Log on to www.aarp.org/contacts/grandparents/taxtips.)

Head Start: Head Start programs generally provide free half-day school-year care for eligible low-income children ages 3 – 5. Some programs also provide full-day, year-



round programs. Grandparents may have to prove legal guardianship of their grandchildren in order to enroll them in a Head Start school. Some communities have pre-kindergarten programs that help prepare children for kindergarten. Check with your local school district for detailed information, or call the Parent Information Center, toll-free at 1-800-660-9742 or (307) 684-2277, or log on to www.wpic.org.

School and Educational Needs: You’ll need to contact your local school district to find out where your grandchildren will attend school, and then you’ll need to take the children to the school(s) to register. To register your grandchildren, you’ll need:

- ✓ proof of guardianship
- ✓ their birth certificates (for kindergarten)
- ✓ immunization records
- ✓ school records, if the children have been enrolled in another school
- ✓ proof of residency



As soon as possible, get to know your grandchildren’s teacher(s), and inform them that you are raising the children. Make every effort to have open communication between you, your grandchildren, and the school. Try to attend parent-teacher conferences or

arrange for telephone conferences so you can be informed about your grandchildren's progress and performance in school.

Educational expectations have changed since most grandparents raised their own children. Issues like state standards, assessments, *No Child Left Behind*, adequate yearly progress, body of evidence, etc., are all new terms that most grandparents have not needed to understand. However, now that you are responsible for overseeing your grandchildren's schooling, you need to have a better understanding of what these terms mean to your grandchildren and their education. (Contact the Parent Education Network, toll-free at 1-877-900-9736 or 307-684-7441, or log on to www.wpen.net for more information about these educational issues.)

If you are unable to help your grandchildren with their homework, ask the school or the teachers for extra help. Don't be embarrassed if you don't understand the homework—things have changed in the educational field and it's OK to ask for help. *Keep in mind that it is in your grandchild's best interest that you seek additional help or instruction for him or her.*

Children who come to live with their grandparents may already be behind in their schooling due to circumstances beyond their control, so the sooner you get extra help for them in their school work, the less at-risk they may be as far as school is concerned.

Initiate communication with the school counselor and nurse. These professionals often have advice and resources for grandparents on social services in the community that might help their grandchildren. This may include information about programs for learning and behavioral problems and other special needs that your grandchildren may have.

Important Questions to Ask in a Family Caregiver Discussion

(Source: www.aarp.org/states/wy)

If you and your family are considering raising a grandchild or grandchildren, here are a few questions to consider before making the decision.



- Do you anticipate caring permanently for the children until they reach 18 years of age (or longer if the children remain in school or have disabilities)?

- How will the children's education be affected? (change of school, grandparents' involvement, etc.)
- What about an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for any children with disabilities?
- Will you be able to care for the children permanently, given your age and the ages of the children and other special needs that they may have?
- Have you had trouble enrolling the children in school, obtaining health care for the children, or accessing other benefits for the children because you don't have legal custody?
- Are you worried that the child's parent(s) will take the child back unexpectedly or inappropriately?
- How long have the children lived with you?
- How strong is the relationship between you and the child?
- What is the likelihood that the child's parent(s) will be able to resume custody?
- What kind of changes in family relationships will be caused by court involvement?
- What kinds of emotional, social, and financial supports are available to the kinship family now?
- How would legal custody help enhance the supports available?

First Steps to Take

A group of Wyoming agencies compiled this checklist of initial steps to help grandparent caregivers avoid difficulties as they navigate the legal, educational and medical systems.

Should you find yourself unexpectedly thrust into the role of caregiver, this guide provides a checklist to assist you in gaining the authority and access you will need to care for your grandchild.

If you are not in such an emergency, this guide offers suggestions of steps you should take in advance of a crisis as well as a glimpse of the steps you will need to be prepared to take once you become the primary caregiver. Your local Department of Family Services can help to facilitate family partnership meetings to support families who are making decisions regarding the care of minor grandchildren.

- Gather family members and discuss who will be responsible for your grandchild legally and financially. Also consider who will make medical and educational

decisions for your grandchild. If possible, do this before an emergency requires immediate decisions.

- Decide where the child will live, or who will have physical custody. This is not always the same household as that of the legal guardian.
- Research your legal options by reading through the glossary of legal terms and considering some important questions (asked in the previous section). Then make a brief call to an attorney for general advice about how to proceed. If you don't know an attorney, consult the Directory of Services for information on legal services available in Wyoming (included in this document).
- As a family, make your decision and have it made legally enforceable. You can do this by hiring an attorney who specializes in guardianship or whose practice is family law, and have custody or guardianship papers drawn up. *Be aware that this process will cost time and money.* For a private attorney, estimate a \$750-1500, minimum \$500 for at least a couple of hours to meet with them and for their subsequent work. If this is not something you can afford, you can inquire about legal services including pro bono or sliding-scale rates based on your income level. (See the Directory of Services.)
- In the event of a parent's death, obtain a copy of the death certificate, the last will and testament if one exists and/or any other legal documents that indicate the designation of a preferred guardian, and contact the Social Security Administration about survivor benefits. Call 1-800-772-1213, or log on to www.ssa.gov.
- Consult the Wyoming Department of Family Services (DFS) about various types of support including financial assistance options. (See "Directory of Services: Information & Support Services—Wyoming Department of Family Services" for more details on available services.)
- Notify your grandchild's school of the situation. Be sure to have the child's records altered to reflect any change in custody.
- Consider medical coverage as well as services—will a change in custody alter the child's insurance coverage? If you can't provide coverage, consult DFS about alternatives. Medical records will need to reflect any change in custody—do this early to prevent possible problems in an emergency.
- If there is a living parent who will not be assuming custody, you may be able to file for child support. Consult DFS or your attorney for more information.
- Consider practical and emotional support for you and your family, including caregiver training and respite services offered through the Wyoming Department of

Health and local grandparent support groups such as Circle of Parents™ sponsored by Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming.

- Think about the possibility of securing a durable power of attorney to authorize you to make legal decisions for the child.
- Obtain a medical release which gives you permission to seek medical help for your grandchildren.

Legal Glossary

You may encounter the following terminology when interacting with attorneys and service agencies.

Physical Custody: An informal agreement between parents and grandparents in which the grandparents care for the grandchildren in their home without official or legal authority by a court. The grandparents have no formal or legal rights to make decisions about the grandchildren, and the birth parents keep all rights and responsibilities relating to the children.

Legal Custody: A legal status created by court order that gives custody of the grandchildren to the grandparents (or other guardian). Grandparents have the legal authority to make decisions relating to the welfare of the grandchildren. Birth parents remain financially responsible for the children, and while the birth parents do not have custody of the children, they do have visitation rights (which may be supervised visitation if the grandparents so wish).

Parental Rights (or definition of “a parent”): Other than those rights and duties included in legal custody, parental rights and duties include the duty to support and provide necessities of life; the right to consent to adoption, to reasonable visitation unless restricted or prohibited by court order, to determine the minor’s religious affiliation and to petition on behalf of the minor. Even upon loss of legal custody, these are residual parental rights.

Guardianship: This is a legal arrangement in which an adult has the court-ordered authority and responsibility to care for a child. This situation may become necessary in the event of the death of a parent, or if the child has been abandoned, neglected, or abused. Guardians have the authority to consent for medical treatment, enroll children in school, get birth certificates, and prevent birth parents from taking the children back

without the court's approval. Once guardianship is ordered by the court, the child must live with the guardian, but the rights of the birth parents are not cut off entirely. Birth parents have the right to challenge the guardian's power, the right to ask for custody of the child to be returned to them, and the right to reasonable visitation.

Temporary or Emergency Guardian: An appointment of temporary guardianship that is initiated by petition and determined by court hearing for educational, medical care and dental care purposes shall be limited to not more than one (1) year. This Wyoming law, effective July 1, 2005, allows caregivers, such as grandparents, to petition the courts to gain temporary guardianship of children under 18 years old who are in their care. To receive a packet that will help guide you through the actual forms of this process, call AARP toll-free at 1-866-663-3290 or go online to www.aarp.org/wy to download the forms that you will need to present to the court for temporary guardianship.

Stand-By Guardian: A guardian designated by petition and authorized by court order prior to, and whose authority is activated upon, the occurrence of a specified event or the origination of a described mental or physical health condition of the petitioner, or current custodian. Once designated, this person can step in without requiring further attorney services or court orders as guardian in temporary or emergency situations until final decisions are made. This option is applicable to situations in which the acting parent (a) is seriously but temporarily ill, or (b) has a terminal and/or debilitating condition that prevents them from providing primary care, or (c) is deployed or otherwise absent.

Educational Surrogate Parent: An educational surrogate parent is an individual who has been appointed to represent the educational interests of a child *when the parent is unable or unwilling to do so*. A surrogate parent is appointed by a school district or other appropriate agency to ensure that the educational rights of a child are protected. Grandparents or foster parents may serve as Educational Surrogate Parents if they meet the Wyoming Department of Education requirements.

Adoption: The effect of this act terminates a former parent or guardian's rights to the control or custody of the child. The adopting person shall have all of those rights and obligations respecting the child as if they were natural parents. The adopting parents will not need to annually report to the courts as a guardianship requires. The key determining factor in an adoption is addressing the permanency of the placement. Adoption permanently transfers all parental rights from the birth parents to the adoptive parents.

Permanency: As defined by Wyoming Department Family Services, permanency is the method or approach which considers the individualized, most appropriate, permanent home for a child, including, but not limited to relatives, adoption, guardianship, or independent living. (Source: Wyoming AARP, www.aarp.org/states/wy)

Directory of Services



Legal Services

- **Wyoming State Bar Lawyer Referral Service**
This agency provides names of attorneys based on the type of law practiced and geographical location. The service lists Wyoming-licensed attorneys that handle family law issues. Call (307) 632-9061 or log on to www.wyomingbar.org.
- **Wyoming Legal Services**
Legal advice and brief services provided to persons age 60 and over and direct services to low-income clients in civil cases, as well as training and community education on elder law issues upon request. Phone 1-800-442-6170 or log on to www.WyomingLawHelp.org.
- **Wyoming Guardianship Corporation**
Provides guardianship information and referral services, mental health services and assistance with management of Social Security and survivors' benefits. Grandparents with grandchildren age 18 with disabilities should refer to this office to arrange Social Security benefits for these grandchildren. Phone: (307) 635-8422.

Information & Support Services

- **Wyoming Department of Family Services (DFS):** Offices statewide provide information about programs, services and applicant eligibility, including financial assistance, Medicaid, child care and food stamps. Call your local (county) department of family services office or log on to dfsweb.state.wy.us or call the state office at 1-800-457-3659. (Most local—county—DFS offices are listed in the telephone directory under “Wyoming State Government: Family Services Department”.)

- ✓ **Food Stamp Program:** The Food Stamp program, under the Department of Family Services (DFS), is the cornerstone of the federal food assistance program, and provides crucial support to needy households and to those making the transition from welfare to work. Call (307) 777-6786 or call your local (county) DFS office.

- ✓ **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF):** The Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is known as the Personal Opportunities With Employment Responsibilities (**POWER**) program in Wyoming. POWER is a time limited "pay after performance" program (cash assistance) which assures individuals with a dependent child(ren) or couples with a dependent child(ren) who are working on a plan to become self-sufficient through employment, child support and other appropriate resources. Under the Department of Family Services, this program can provide cash assistance to make up for child support to caretaker *relatives* for the needs of a child under age 18 *if the relative will pursue the parents for child support*. Call the POWER program at (307) 777-7290, (307) 777-5841, or your local (county) Department of Family Services office.

- **Wyoming Department of Health, Aging Division**
This Division is responsible for the National Family Caregiver Support Program, a federal program which provides services to grandparents 60 years of age or older who are the caregivers of children 19 years of age or younger. These services include respite care, counseling, information and referrals. The Wyoming Department of Health, Aging Division partners with Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming and the Guardianship Program and contracts with hospitals, senior centers and home health offices to provide services to families. Contact the Wyoming Department of Health, Aging Division at (307) 777-8566.

- **Wyoming Department of Health**
 - ✓ **Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program:** One hundred percent federally-funded program that provides a nutritious supplemental food package, nutrition, and breast-feeding education and health referral to pregnant, postpartum, and breast-feeding women, and infants and children up to age five whose incomes fall at or below 185% of poverty and who exhibit a nutrition-related health risk. Services are provided through 19 local WIC offices serving 36 Wyoming communities. Call (307) 777-7494 or log on to wdh.state.wy.us. "programs".

- **Community and Family Health Division:** Various programs offer assistance in accessing and applying for local and specialty services, regarding dental, immunizations, parenting classes and developmental disabilities. Call the Wyoming Department of Health, (307) 777-6004.
 - ✓ **Maternal and Family Health:** Maternal and Family Health is dedicated to assuring care for every child and family through federal, state, and community partnerships including the following MCH programs and initiatives: Adolescent Health; Safe Kids of Wyoming; Genetic and Metabolic Testing Services; Perinatal Systems (including Home Visiting and Best Beginnings Programs); Family Planning; Children with Special Health Care Needs; and Premature Newborn Follow-Up Services. Call (307) 777-7942.

- **Developmental Disabilities Division:** This state department works to provide funding and guidance to meet the needs of people with disabilities who live and work in Wyoming communities. Call (307) 777-7115 or log on to ddd.state.wy.us. for more information.
 - ✓ **DDD, Part C Coordinator:** Early intervention and education for infants and toddlers (ages birth through two) who may have developmental delays. Call (307) 777-6972 or log on to ddd.state.wy.us. Call the Parent Information Center at 1-800-660-9247 or log on to www.wpic.org.
 - ✓ **DDD, Part B Coordinator:** Early intervention and education for children ages 3 – 5 who have developmental delays or disabilities. Call 307-777-8762 or log on to wdh.state.wy.us/ddd/preschool.asp.
 - ✓ **Children's Home and Community-Based Waiver Program:** Serves children, adolescents and young adults with mental retardation, ages birth to 21 with services designed to keep them in their home communities. Call (307) 777-3321.
 - ✓ **Respite Care:** It is important for parents (or grandparents) to be able to take a break (respite) from the care of their child for a couple of hours. Because it is often expensive to find someone to care for children with disabilities, the base rate for respite providers is \$8.00 an hour. There is a co-payment system based on income. Call (307) 777-3694.
 - ✓ **Developmental Preschools:** These statewide centers provide a collection of services for children who have developmental delays, and services for young children ages birth through five with disabilities. There are 14 Regional Centers. Call (307) 777-5246 for more information.

- **Wyoming State Health Care Programs:**
 - ✓ **Kid Care CHIP** is a low-cost health insurance plan that provides health insurance coverage to eligible uninsured children who are under the age of 19. Families whose children qualify for Kid Care CHIP will share in the cost of their children's health insurance by paying a small co-payment for services. Call 1-877-543-7669.
 - ✓ **Equality Care** provides complete health care coverage at no cost for uninsured and underinsured children and teens. Children in the care of grandparents may qualify for this health coverage if they meet the eligibility guidelines. Grandparent income is not a factor for grandparents raising their grandchildren if they are not legally financially responsible for the children in their care. Call 1-877-543-7669 or your local Department of Family Services office.
- **Children and Nutrition Services, Inc. (CNS):** CNS is known throughout Wyoming for supporting providers, families and children through dedicated programs and services. CNS is a statewide sponsor of the Child and Adult Care Food Program, for home-based child care. Call toll free 1-800-578-4017 or (307) 266-1236.
- **Child Care Finder:** Wyoming's Child Care Resource and Referral Network assists parents and guardians in locating child care and preschool programs that meet family needs. The program also provides consultation and assistance in evaluating and choosing appropriate childcare. The Resources and Referral Service Network is available statewide. Call 1-800-578-4017, (307) 266-1236, or log on to www.childrens-nutrition.com.
- **Circle of Parents™** for Grandparents: Circle of Parents™ mutual support groups for grandparents provide support for grandparents parenting again. Grandparents can share ideas and speak with other grandparents raising their grandchildren. Call Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming to locate a group near you. PCA Wyoming is focused on the prevention of child abuse by providing public and parent education and advocacy for strengthening families. Call 1-800-CHILDREN or (307) 637-8622.
- **Wyoming Senior Citizens Inc.:** Provides senior information, counseling and referral services about respite care, Wyoming state health insurance, and employment programs for those 55 years and older. Call (307) 856-6880.
- **Parent Education Network:** PEN is a statewide parent training and information project that helps parents become more actively involved in their children's education. PEN provides support, encouragement, and information about parenting and educational issues. Call 307-684-7441 or toll-free 1-877-900-9736, or log on to www.wpen.net.

- **Parent Information Center:** PIC provides information, training, and support to families of children with disabilities and the people who work with them. PIC helps families better understand education issues as they relate to their child's disability, special education law, and their rights and responsibilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Call 307-684-2277 or toll-free 1-800-660-9742, or log on to www.wpic.org.

Information on Getting Documents

In order to apply for public assistance, medical services, and school enrollment for your grandchildren in your care, you will need to have certain documents.

- **Birth Certificates:** Requests must include the following information:
 - Full name on birth record
 - Fee: \$12.00
 - Date of birth
 - City or county of birth
 - Full names of both parents including mother's maiden name
 - Signature of parent or the individual themselves if over the age of 18
 - Mailing address where record is to be mailed

Birth certificates can be obtained by:

Registrant if 18 years of age

Either parent named on the certificate

Lawyer representing the registrant or parent(s)

Legal guardian with guardianship papers

Contact Vital Records Services at (307) 777-7591 or log on to

www.wdhfs.state.wy.us.vital_records

- **Social Security Card:** To get a Social Security number, you will need to provide documents that show your identity, age, and citizenship or lawful alien status. You can get more information 24 hours a day by calling Social Security's toll-free number, 1-800-772-1213. You can call for an appointment or to speak to a service representative between the hours of 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on business days. If you have a touch-tone phone, recorded information and services are available 24 hours a day, including weekends and holidays. People who are deaf or hard of hearing may call the toll-free "TTY" number 1-800-325-0778, between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on business days. Social Security publications are available to users of the Internet. Log on to www.ssa.gov to access these publications.

- **Medical Records:** If you have not raised your grandchildren from birth, you probably don't have their medical records. If you can get these records from the children's parents, do so. If they have no medical records, ask them to sign a consent to have the records released to the family physician or medical facility where your grandchild will be treated. If no records are available, list all of the child's medical history that you know—including any illnesses or medical conditions that may be of interest to the doctor.

Other Financial Resources:

Grandparents on a fixed income or who are nearing retirement may find it a big financial burden to provide for their grandchildren for the long term without some outside financial help. Avoid using your retirement savings to pay the extra bills that come with unexpected children in your home. Instead, see if you can get assistance from a few government programs that are there to help you.

- ✓ **Social Security Dependents Benefits:** Your grandchild may be able to get a Social Security check each month. This may be possible if a parent has died or if your grandchild has a disability. These benefits are payable to children under the age of 18 on the record of a parent who is collecting retirement or disability benefits from Social Security, or survivors benefits payable to children under the age of 18 on the record of a parent who has died. Although children under age 18 who are eligible for these benefits might be disabled, we do not need to consider their disability to qualify them for benefits. A child can continue receiving dependent's or survivor's benefits until age 19 if he or she is a full-time student in elementary or high school. Social Security's Internet Website is www.socialsecurity.gov or call toll-free: 1-800-772-1213; TTY 1-800-325-0778.
- ✓ **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** provides low income elderly, blind or disabled individuals, including children, with financial assistance in the form of monthly payments. Parents or guardians may apply for blind or disabled children under age 18. Contact your local Social Security office, call 1-800-772-1213, or log on to www.ssa.gov. for more information and to see if your grandchildren qualify for benefits.
- ✓ **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** is a program that provides working grandparents who qualify with assistance by either (1) if you owe taxes—reducing the amount you

owe or giving you money back; or (2) if you owe no taxes—giving you money back. Call the Internal Revenue Service at 1-800-829-1040; for hearing impaired, call 1-800-829-4059, or log on to www.irs.gov.

- ✓ **Child Tax Credit.** This credit lets you subtract \$600 from your Federal tax for each child in your care. You must claim the child as a dependent, the child must be younger than 17, and must be a U.S. citizen. Log on to www.irs.gov for further information, or contact your local accountant.

Challenges Facing Children Today

Raising children today presents many challenges for parents as well as grandparents who thought their child-rearing days were over. At very early ages children learn about drugs, alcohol, sex, violence and gangs—and not all of their learning comes from television. Some of it, unfortunately, comes from first-hand experiences in less than ideal environments before the children come to live with their grandparents. If your grandchildren come to you with a knowledge of such behaviors, your task in raising them and teaching them right from wrong becomes even more complex; however, it is still important to do, and very possible with some counseling from community resources, and love and guidance from you.

Your grandchildren may have been placed in your care because of events which took place in their lives that made them “street smart” at a young age but which have led to their being developmentally deficient and behind in their schooling. Or they may be in your care because of the loss of a parent through death or divorce, in which case you will also have to deal with their grief and sadness as well as your own.

Some of the serious issues that children face today include:

- ✓ **Alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse:** The younger a person is when he/she starts to use alcohol, tobacco, and/or drugs, the more likely he or she is to develop problems related to such use. Understanding the dangers connected with alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse is a great deterrent, but many young people don’t see any harm in using drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. They must be educated about the dangers, and they must see the significant people in their lives (grandparents, now) modeling safe behaviors.

- ✓ **Gangs:** In today's society, criminal gang activity is on the rise. It is not illegal to be in a gang; however, when gangs participate in activities that break the law, their *actions* are illegal. It is not unusual for children—especially teenagers—to want to belong to a group. However, if that group is a *gang*, it may be difficult, or even dangerous, to ever quit the group. Children need to feel a strong sense of belonging to some group with which they can identify, share their ups and downs, and whose company they enjoy. To belong to a *family* unit even if it is not a “typical” father-mother-brothers-sisters type of family unit is important to a child.
- ✓ **Sexuality:** Sometimes parents have trouble talking to their children about sexual issues; grandparents may find it even more difficult. However, the need is great for children to get correct information about sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, birth control, and pregnancy. While children may learn about sexuality in school, from their friends, or through television shows and music, that doesn't mean that they understand the complexities of becoming sexually active too soon. Contact your local public health office or your family physician for help if you find this topic uncomfortable for you and your grandchildren.
- ✓ **Abuse:** If your grandchildren are in your care because of child abuse or neglect, they may need more than your tender loving care. An examination by your family physician or the public health nurse may be a good place to start. You may need to get an evaluation by a mental health counselor and follow-up sessions to help the children deal with the emotional wounds of abuse.
- ✓ **Internet Use:** Access to world information—both good and bad, positive and negative—is available to children by way of the Internet. Grandparents must monitor their grandchildren's use of the Internet to guard against children being solicited by pedophiles or others wishing to take advantage of them, and to ensure that children are not visiting inappropriate websites.

Things Grandchildren Need the Most:

If your grandchildren are living with you, it is most likely due to circumstances beyond their control and that they did not ask for. Most children would like to be living with their brothers and sisters in a stable two-parent household, with the pleasure of being able to visit their grandparents frequently. However, sometimes situations take place which make that “dream” home life impossible.



Here are some tips for helping to create as normal a home life as possible for children who have been moved from their parents' home to their grandparents' home:

- ✓ Children of all ages *need to be told that they are loved*. Don't assume that your grandchildren know you love them just because you took them in to your home.
- ✓ Practice good listening skills; give your undivided attention to your grandchildren when they are telling you something.
- ✓ Start with only a few rules—the ones that are necessary to protect and guide your grandchildren. You can add more later as they become necessary.
- ✓ Be sure you know why you are making the rules and why you say “no”. Explain your reasons and make sure your grandchildren understand your reasons.
- ✓ Give your grandchildren a voice. Allow them to express their thoughts about the limits you have set. You may not agree with each other, but you need to discuss the issues for clear understanding. Kids are more likely to obey the rules when they are permitted to help make them or at least when reasons for the rules are explained.
- ✓ Praise your grandchildren for doing things correctly. Simply saying, “Thank you for getting your homework done before dinner tonight,” reinforces that behavior. Unkind words lower a child's confidence and self-esteem; praise builds a child's confidence, reinforces acceptable behavior, and strengthens good communication.
- ✓ Set routines and times for bedtime, meals, and chores. Establishing routines helps to create stability and makes children feel safe. You may need to remind them of the rules, but they should know what to expect.
- ✓ Treat your grandchildren with respect and kindness—they are not responsible for the circumstances which brought them to live with you.
- ✓ Remember that you are two generations apart. Your grandchildren's background may be very different from yours: they may not know about long-standing family traditions or cultures; they may actually speak a different language; fashions (hairstyles, dress, etc.) today are different from what grandparents grew up with, and grandparents need to be sensitive to the peer pressure that children may face, and the need to act like others their age.
- ✓ Remember that it takes time for children to adjust to a new environment—don't expect full obedience to your household rules and routines right away. The older the grandchildren are, the more difficult it may be for them to change. If they have been living in a setting where there were no rules and no adult supervision, or where

there was abuse or neglect, the adjustment to a more stable, nurturing, loving environment may take time. *Be patient and loving.*

Be ready for your grandchildren to experience a variety of emotions including:

- Fear—of separation, of abandonment, of the unknown future
- Confusion—about why the parent is not providing a home and care, where the parent is, to whom they should be loyal, on whom they should depend
- Anger—about the troubled family situation, about being neglected or abandoned; (and the anger may be taken out on the grandparents)
- Grief—if a death has occurred, the grief is obvious; if the parents are alive but absent, the child may grieve the lost relationship—even if abuse is a reason for the change in the child’s residence.
- Guilt—children may blame themselves for the problems that led to their having to live with their grandparents, or they may secretly feel relieved to be removed from the parents
- Divided loyalties—children may feel torn between their love for their parents and their love for their grandparents

Strategies for Coping When Raising Grandchildren

The decision to raise your grandchildren under any circumstances cannot be taken lightly. To assume this responsibility—regardless of the age of your grandchild or the ages of your grandchildren if there is more than one—means an enormous change in your lifestyle. Knowing that you’ll be doing the right thing for your grandbabies will help you to cope—even when the going is rough.

There will be times when you will feel overwhelmed, but remember:

YOU ARE NOT ALONE AND HELP IS AVAILABLE!

If you’re not sure where to *start* in getting help, call the Wyoming AARP at 1-866-663-3290 or log on to www.aarp.org/wy. A call to the Parent Information Center at 1-800-600-9742 or the Parent Education Network at 1-877-900-9736 will connect you with someone who will help you get started on the path to finding help in raising your grandchildren.



Keep these coping strategies in mind:

- Take care of yourself, both physically and mentally
- Eat right (this will also model good eating habits for your grandchildren)
- Get plenty of rest and exercise regularly
- Visit with your physician about any physical, emotional, or mental problems
- Seek outside help—you can't always be super-grandparents when you are also your grandchildren's parents
- Seek help from support groups in your area. (Think about visiting your local Senior Center to find other grandparents who just may be raising their grandchildren, too.)
- If there are no support groups, consider starting one.

It is very important for grandparents to receive support and assistance. Seeking out other family members, clergy, support groups and social agencies can be helpful. The Grandparents Information Center (sponsored by the American Association of Retired Persons) is a good place to get information, referrals, and support. The American Association of Retired Persons website address is www.aarp.org. Financial aid may be available, especially if the child was abandoned, neglected, or abused. Mental health professionals including child and adolescent psychiatrists, community mental health and child welfare agencies and parent-teacher associations are other important resources for the grandparents.

How Can Support Groups Help?

Support groups:

1. offer emotional support to grandparents who feel alone and isolated.
2. create a network of grandparents who are in caregiving situations.
3. offer guidance, assistance and advice to grandparents in their efforts to care for their grandchildren.
4. give grandparents ideas on formulating positive solutions to difficult and challenging problems.
5. serve as a clearinghouse for resources and information.



6. offer a safe, understanding place for grandparents to discuss the emotional ups and downs of raising their grandchildren.
7. provide tools for advocacy and awareness of issues facing grandparents raising grandchildren.

(Source: Illinois Department on Aging “Starting Points for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Resource Guide with Information & Services for Grandparent Caregivers” www.state.il.us/aging)

How to Get Involved



Effective July 1, 2005, state law in Wyoming allows caregivers, such as grandparents, to petition the courts to gain temporary guardianship of children under 18 years of age in their care. This temporary legal custody would enable grandparents to enroll the children in school, access their medical records, or consent to their medical and dental treatment, if the parents or legal guardians are unavailable.

To receive a packet that will help guide you through the actual forms of this process, call AARP at 1-866-663-3290 or go online to www.aarp.org\wy to download the forms that you will need to present to the court for temporary guardianship.

Additional support groups can be found through the **AARP Grandparent Information Center** Database. Call 1-888-OUR-AARP or 1-888-687-2277, e-mail information requests to gic@arp.org, or search AARP’s online kinship care support group database at <http://www.aarp.org>.

Additional state and national kinship care resources and supports are available at **Generations United** website at <http://www.gu.org>
GrandsPlace at <http://www.grandsplace.com>
Grandparent Again at <http://www.grandparentagain.com>.

State Laws and Policies

Sometimes kinship caregivers find it difficult to obtain services their children need, such as medical care or education. In addition to the state’s child guardianship and custody laws, the following law may be helpful to kinship caregivers:

Standby Guardianship (WYO. STAT. § 3-2-108): This law allows a child's parent or legal guardian to appoint a standby guardian to assume the care of the child upon the death or incapacity of the parent or guardian. Log on to www.standbyguardianship.org/national/wy.asp.

Books for Grandparents:

1. *To Grandmother's House We...Stay: When You Have to Stop Spoiling Your Grandchildren and Start Raising Them* by Sally Houtman. Northridge Ca., Studio 4 Productions, 1999.
2. *Grandparents as Parents: A Survival Guide for Raising a Second Family* by Sylvie De Toldeo and Deborah Edler-Brown. New York. The Guilford Press, 1995.
3. Books by Arthur Kornhaber, M.D.:
Grandparents/Grandchildren-The Vital Connection (with Kenneth L. Woodward). Doubleday. 1982.
Between Parents and Grandparents. St. Martin's Press 1986
Spirit, St Martin's Press 1988.
Grandparent Power (with Sondra Forsythe). Crown/ Random House, 1995.
Contemporary Grandparenting. Sage Press 1987.
The Grandparent Guide. Contemporary-McGraw-Hill, 2002.
The Grandparent Solution. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2004.

Sources:

AARP Wyoming "Wyoming Resource Guide for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren", www.aarp.org/states/wy

AARP Grandparent Information Center Database. Call 1-888-687-2277, or log on to www.giclocalsupport.org.

GrandsPlace: "for Grandparents and Special Others Raising Children", www.grandsplace.com

Generations United website: www.gu.org.

Grandparent Again website: www.grandparentagain.com.

Illinois Department on Aging "Starting Points for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Resource Guide with Information & Services for Grandparent Caregivers" www.state.il.us/aging)

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) www.aacap.org Channing Bete Company, Inc. 2002

