

Published on *SeniorNavigator* (<https://seniornavigator.org>)

Grandparents Finding the Parenting Job is Not Over

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

When needed, grandparents have for generations jumped in to help raise their children's kids. Many well known Americans spent most of their childhoods raised by grandparents, including former President Bill Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, Tipper Gore, and United States Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

Today, however, more and [more grandparents are being called upon to raise their grandchildren](#). The number of children raised by grandparents rose more than 30 percent since 1990. More than one in five children live in households headed by grandparents. Additionally, a grandparent cares for one out of every five preschool children having a working mother. Being the primary caregiver for grandchildren is not the way most grandparents plan to spend their golden years. Yet, as many people are finding out, once you are a parent, you are a parent for life. Becoming a grandparent doesn't change that; the two roles are often rolled together.

Many things have brought grandparents back into family life where they are needed to be a source of love, strength, stability, and enrichment in the lives of grandchildren. In many instances, grandparents are a family's most powerful natural resource. Drug or alcohol abuse among natural parents is often (44 percent of the time) the reason grandparents have to step in. Of grandchildren living with grandparents, another 28 percent do so because of child abuse, neglect, or abandonment; 11 percent due to the death of a parent or parents; and four percent because of divorce. Other reasons include incarceration or institutionalization of the parent or parents.

Issues and Challenges

The overwhelming majority of grandparents raising grandchildren must do so on limited incomes. Almost half of grandparents raising grandchildren live on fixed incomes and nearly two-thirds of caregiving grandparents do so without public assistance. More than half of grandmothers raising their grandchildren alone have incomes below the poverty level. When coupled with the high cost of medical care and prescription drugs, the financial implications are staggering.

Child day care is also a major problem. More than half of caregiving grandparents work, making day care a necessity that can be very costly.

Adding to the frustration is the fact that more than one-third of parenting grandparents did not graduate from high school. This not only often locks them into lower paying jobs, but also can affect their ability to help older grandchildren with homework or school projects.

Legal hurdles can also create problems. Registering a grandchild for school, providing health care, and protecting a grandchild from an abusive parent can require obtaining legal custody. Most states, including Virginia, have parental preference laws, so it can be extremely difficult to convince a judge that the child belongs with someone else - even if that someone else is a loving grandparent.

Getting Help

Resources for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren are slowly becoming more available, as the incidence increases. Some schools, churches and social service organizations can connect seniors with outreach services, intergenerational programs, support groups, legal assistance and links to the state's health insurance program for uninsured low income children. By searching the [VirginiaNavigator website](#), grandparents can be connected with many of the resources available to help. Also, AARP has resources for grandparents through their [GrandFamilies Guide](#).

Positive Change

While the number of Legal barriers to custody and surrogate decision making need to be removed so loving grandparents can get the help they need. If more resources are necessary, taxpayers should advocate for increased funding - if for no other reason than grandparents caring for kids is far less costly than foster care. Aging is a lifetime family affair - so is parenting.

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Article Source

Jefferson Area Board for Aging

Source URL

<https://www.jabacares.org>

Last Reviewed

Monday, April 22, 2024