

ARE YOU A GRANDPARENT OR KINSHIP CARER?

When children can't live with their parents, people in the family or family friends might become their primary carers. This is called grandparent or kinship care.

HOW DO YOU BECOME A GRANDPARENT OR KINSHIP CARER?

Becoming a grandparent or kinship carer can be a sudden change for both you and the child. You might have had some idea that there was a problem in the child's family. Or perhaps the first sign of a problem was a call from the police or child protection authority to let you know the child needed care. Sometimes you might not know how long you'll be caring for the child. It can all be a big shock.

YOU MIGHT BE A GRANDPARENT OR KINSHIP CARER IF...

AN INFORMAL ARRANGEMENT

There is an agreement with the child's family about caring for the child, without a court order like a child protection order or a family law order. These arrangements are often verbal. The child's parents are still the legal guardians, so they have parental responsibility. Under an informal agreement, there are limits to the decisions a grandparent or kinship carer can make without parental consent.

AN INFORMAL ARRANGEMENT PLUS A FAMILY LAW ORDER FROM THE FAMILY COURT

The Order lists who has parental responsibility for the child - for example, a grandparent or kinship carer - and can give some security about the caring arrangement. The Court can determine who has custody and guardianship of the child, who the child will live with, and who can have contact. A family law order is usually made when the family can't agree on the best custody and contact arrangements for the child.

A FORMAL ARRANGEMENT WITH A CHILD PROTECTION ORDER

This arrangement occurs when a child protection order is made by the state or territory Child Protection Court. A child protection order is used when there's been a report to the child protection authority about a child's safety and wellbeing. The Court determines who has parental responsibility and for how long. A grandparent or kinship carer can apply for full or shared parental responsibility. This arrangement gives the grandparent or kinship carer formal carer status, like foster carers have.

HOW CAN CARING IMPACT YOU?

Being a grandparent or kinship carer can be a joyful experience, but it is also challenging. It can be stressful to suddenly take children into your home. Sometimes it can cause tension or conflict among family members. The legal arrangements for children's care can be complicated and confusing. The children might be sad, frightened or angry, which can cause difficult behaviour. You might be spending your savings or retirement funds on raising the children. Costs can be high, especially if the child has additional needs. Finding information might be difficult and frustrating.

HOW CAN YOU CARE FOR YOURSELF?

It can be hard to find time to take care of yourself, but it is an important part of your caring role.

Some tips for taking care of yourself include:

STAY CONNECTED

Connecting with family and friends is a very important part of taking care of yourself. Being a grandparent or kinship carer often means big changes to your social life. It might be harder to fit in a regular activity, see extended family or have a meal out with friends. It might take more organising and planning ahead to make it happen, but it's important not to lose touch with your friends and family.

PUT YOURSELF FIRST SOMETIMES

Taking some time for yourself, even if it's just 15 minutes each day doing something you enjoy - reading, going for a walk, or working in the garden is an important part of putting your own health and wellbeing first. Make time for at least one regular activity of your own. You might need to look into childcare to help you do this.

ASK FOR HELP

Friends, family, local community organisations, schools, agencies and local services can all help you. Sometimes you might need help with little things like babysitting while you do the grocery shopping. Other times you might need help with bigger things like getting your child in to see a counsellor.

Talk to one of our friendly staff members about the supports, resources, and respite available to grandparent or kinship or alternatively, visit our website at youthfocus.com.au/resources