



SYSTEM OF CARE

“Health is a state of body. Wellness is a state of being.”
- J. Stanford

A New “Normal”, Grandparents Parenting... Again

The Statistics

When parents are absent or unable to raise their children, grandparents are often the ones who step in. Raising a second generation brings many rewards, including fulfillment of giving your grandkids a sense of security, developing a deeper relationship and keeping the family together. It also comes with many challenges. But with the right guidelines and support, you can roll back the years and make a real difference in the lives of your grandchildren.

In New Hampshire, approximately 8,000 (3%) children live with a relative with no parent present. 17,593 (5.5%) children under 18 live in homes where householders are grandparents or other relatives. 14,886 (5.5%) of these children live with grandparents while 2,707 of these children live with other relatives.¹

Although grandparents have always played a meaningful part in their grandchildren’s lives, in the face of the opioid epidemic in New Hampshire, more are taking on the role of full-time caregivers. That means they have to prepare - emotionally and financially - to raise young kids at a time when most of their peers are slowing down.

So far this year, the Division of Children, Youth and Families, or DCYF, placed more than 300 with relatives, most often a grandparent. And these are just the cases the DCYF reports. According to census numbers, around 2,500 grandparents in New Hampshire are raising their grandchildren.²



The majority of scenarios in which we see grandparents take care of their grandchildren is due in large part to the opioid crisis in the state. There is a small percentage in which the child is removed from the parent because of abuse or neglect, a mental issue, or the loss of a job, and that’s why a grandparent will step up, but the majority of the time it’s related to substance abuse. No matter the reason, nor how deeply the grandchild is loved, grandparents who become parents are exhausted, overburdened, overwhelmed, mystified by the legal issues and absolutely terrified by all the emotional ramifications.

Open hearts aren’t enough. Grandparents soon find that they need open wallets as well. They must provide for the children immediately and suddenly find themselves



having to navigate through the system when it comes to the particularly challenging issues of housing, education, health care, financial matters and the all-important legal status. Without legal guardianship, a grandparent cannot enroll the child in school or authorize medical care for him, and those needing financial assistance must acquire that status before participating in government programs like food stamps, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or Medicaid.³

The prospect of raising grandchildren is bound to trigger a range of emotions. Positive emotions, like the love you feel for your grandchildren, the joy in seeing them learn and grow, the relief at giving them a stable environment, are easy to acknowledge. It's more difficult to admit to feelings such as resentment, guilt or fear.

It's important to acknowledge and accept what you are feeling, both good and bad. Don't beat yourself up over your doubts and misgivings. It's only natural to feel some ambivalence about childrearing at a time when you expected your responsibilities to be dwindling. These feelings don't mean that you don't love your grandchildren.



Feelings aren't right or wrong... they just "are"

If you've been used to the occasional visit from a grandchild, being back in the saddle full time can feel stressful

and overwhelming. You may worry about how you will handle the additional responsibilities and what will happen to the grandkids if something happens to you.

When you start to feel overwhelmed...

Remember that while you may not have the energy you once did when you were younger, you do have the wisdom that only comes with experience - and advantage that can make a huge difference in your grandchild's life. Unlike first-time parent, you've done this before and learned from your mistakes. Don't underestimate what you have to offer!

You may feel anger or resentment toward the parents of the grandchild for leaving you with the responsibility of caring for their child. You might be resentful of other friends who are enjoying the retirement you once envisioned. You might feel guilty and responsible for your child's failures as a parent, second-guessing and regretting your own mistakes when you were first parenting. You may even grieve. There are many losses that come with taking in your grandchildren, including the loss of your independence and the easier role of "grandparent", rather than the primary caregiver. You may grieve for your child and the difficulties that have led to the situation.

You probably were not expecting to be raising kids again at this stage of your life. At times, the physical, emotional, and financial demands may feel overwhelming. That's why it's vitally important that you take care of yourself and get the support you need. When you're preoccupied with the daily demands of raising grandkids, it's easy to let your own needs fall by the wayside. But taking care of yourself is a necessity. You can't be a good caretaker when you're overwhelmed, exhausted and emotionally depleted. In order to keep up with your grandkids, you need to be calm, centered, and focused. Looking after your own mental and physical health is how you get there.

¹ Grandfacts: *State of Fact Sheets for Grandfamilies*

² NHP, "Side Effect of Opioid Crisis: Grandparents Are Raising Kids", Sheryl Rich-Kern, May 2018

³ nhmagazine.com "When you're a Parent... Again", Lynne Snierison,

⁴ Helpguide.org; "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, The Rewards and Challenging of Parenting the Second Time Around", Melinda Smith, M.A, and Jean Segal, Ph.D. Updated: March 2018



Local Resources Are Available...

New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), DHHS District Offices offices <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov> (1-800-852-3345 toll-free in-State) (NH Relay) 7 -1-1. • Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) 1-800-852-3345, www.dhhs.nh.gov/DHHS/FCADOPTION/default and the Relative Care Specialist, 603-271-7338. • Bureau of Child Protection, Central Intake – To report suspected child abuse or neglect call 1-800-894-5533.

211 New Hampshire - Dial 211 or visit www.211nh.org to search for local, regional, statewide, and national resources. 2-1-1 is an easy to remember telephone number that connects callers, at no cost, to information about critical health and human services available in their community. Dial 211 from anywhere in New Hampshire. 1-866-444-4211 from outside New Hampshire. Services can also be accessed at www.211nh.org.

Servicelink Resource Center is a statewide network of locally administered, community-based resources for seniors, adults with disabilities, and their families. This is a free service available to anyone who needs assistance, advice or help with an issue relating to a senior member or disabled adult living in your community. Check out their website to search their resources or contact staff for personalized services. www.nh.gov/servicelink/ 1-866-634- 9412.

Parent to Parent of New Hampshire is a statewide network of families who have children with special needs. This organization connects families to other families who understand the issues and provides referral and support services. Their website focuses on web supports available for families and lists support opportunities in New Hampshire. <http://www.parenttoparentnh.org/>, 1-800-698-LINK.

NH Family Voices (NHFV) assist families in negotiating supports and systems on a one-to-one basis as well as through its workshops. It also has a free lending library of over 1,500 titles of books, videos, and audiotapes with a specialty in children's books on specific conditions and disabilities, sibling relationships, behavior and social issues. <http://www.nhfv.org/> Call 1-800-852-3345 X 4525 or (603) 271-4525 or email at nhfv@yahoo.com.

NH Family Resource Connection is a special program of the New Hampshire State Library to make available information on all aspects of raising healthy children, especially young children with special needs. Through the website you can search their free lending library, an online Directory of Children's Services, and a Family & Youth Development Calendar. Books are available on relative care, foster care and adoption. <http://www.nh.gov/nhsl/frc/> ~ email: FRC@dcr.nh.gov or New Hampshire residents can call 1-800-298-4321. Family Resource Center of Gorham/Berlin is located at 123 Main Street, Gorham, NH 03581 603-446-5190. www.frcberlin-gorham.org

New Hampshire Relatives as Parents Program (NHRAPP) is a program of the UNH Cooperative Extension and offers a web resource for New Hampshire relative caregivers: Grandparents and other relatives raising or helping to raise relative children. The website provides information on local support groups; making ends meet, getting legal and financial help and meeting the needs of your family. Call 603-796-2151 x 314 or go to www.nhrapp.com.

Family Support NH is a statewide coalition of community-based family resource centers and family support programs dedicated to improving the lives of New Hampshire families. Contact Family Support NH for a center or program in your community at www.fsnh.org.

Legal Sources

New Hampshire Legal Assistance (NHLA) - NHLA is a non-profit law firm offering legal services in civil matters to seniors and eligible low-income persons. NHLA provides high quality legal services to vulnerable low-income people, ranging from simple legal information and advice to vigorous and thorough representation in all New Hampshire's courts and before many of the local, state and federal agencies. Visit their website at: <http://www.nhla.org/>. The Berlin office: 1-800-698-8969, Littleton office: 1-800-548-1886, Senior Citizen's Advice Line: 1-800353-9944 or 603-624-6000. TTY: 1-800-634-8989 or 603-206-2299.

Legal Advice and Referral Center www.larcnh.org (603-224-3333) The Legal Advice and Referral Center provides legal services to low income people in New Hampshire in the areas of housing, family law, consumer law, public benefits and related matters through telephone advice and counsel, brief service and direct representation.

Free legal aid NEW HAMPSHIRE <http://www.usattorneylegalservices.com/free-legal-aid-New-Hampshire.html>

New Hampshire Bar Association Pro Bono Referral Program 112 Pleasant Street Concord NH 03301 Phone: 603-224-6942 and 800-639-5290 Fax: 603-224-2910 Federal income tax disputes: 603-228-6028 Free legal information over the phone: 800-868-1212 Free legal advice in civil matters for senior citizens 60 and older: 603-624-6000 and 888-353-9944.

Please visit our WMRS System of Care Web Page for additional resources: http://www.sau36.org/departments/system_of_care