

# Kinship Care: Practical Suggestions for Supporting Custodial Grandparents Across Systems

Children in kinship care settings tend to experience better outcomes than those in foster care. While any relative or adult associated with the family or cultural community can serve as kinship caregivers, grandparents provide most kinship care through both formal and informal arrangements.

In 2019, Calgary and Area RCSD commissioned a literature review to help develop an evidence-based approach to working with kinship caregivers within and across systems. The review revealed that grandparent-headed families are generally underserved and experience multiple barriers to accessing services.

Custodial grandparents face several unique challenges in caring for their grandchildren including: conflict with biological parents and other family members, feelings of grief and loss, parenting challenges, physical and mental health issues, social isolation, financial stress, formal guardianship system barriers, and the further complexities associated with caring for a child who has a disability or exceptional needs.

## Resources and Links

The full [Literature Review](#) and [Executive Summary](#) are available on the Calgary and Area RCSD website.

Several sector-specific presentations have also been developed for use.

## General Tips for Supporting Custodial Grandparents:

- Learn about the expanded roles and unique needs of custodial grandparents
- Help with planning for the future
- Acknowledge and build on the wisdom already present in the 'kinship triad' of grandparent – parent – child
- Use strength-based, non-judgmental language
- Identify and help remove barriers to access services, resources, and supports
- Help caregivers develop effective coping strategies to manage challenging behaviours
- Provide suggestions for low-cost recreational activities and promote participation in intergenerational leisure activities
- Help grandparents understand a child's potential as well as the diagnosis
- Incorporate the needs of the caregiver along with those of their grandchild
- Facilitate social support for kinship caregivers



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Children's Services



Click [here](#) for  
Health, Mental Health, and  
Disability Services



Click [here](#) for  
Education



# Kinship Care: Practical Suggestions for Supporting Custodial Grandparents Within Systems

## Mental Health

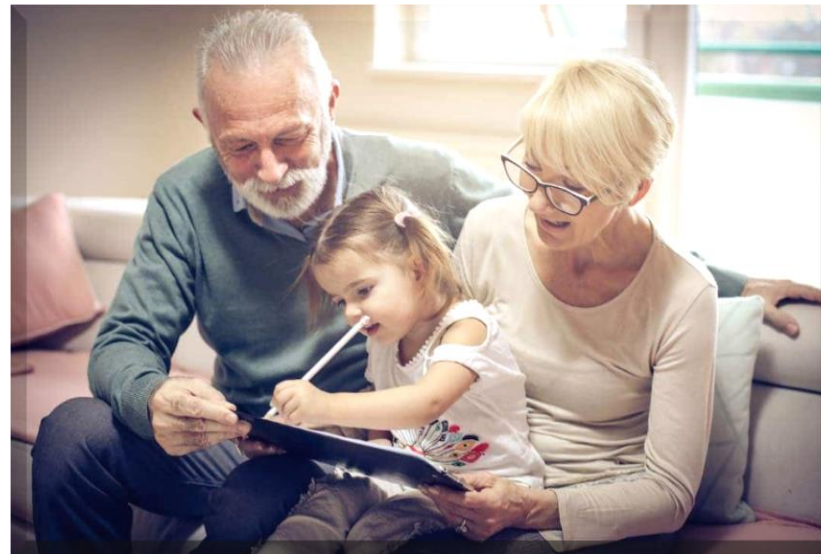
- ✓ Help grandparents keep a focus on the positive aspects and find meaning in kinship parenting, while acknowledging their stressors and challenges
- ✓ Discuss concerns related to the future (i.e., what will happen to their grandchildren when they can no longer care for them?)
- ✓ Build the capacity of custodial grandparents to support children with disrupted attachments
- ✓ Identify risks related to intergenerational patterns of trauma and relationship dysfunction, and provide therapeutic supports to address transgenerational trauma as needed

## Education

- ✓ Make the school environment more welcoming by hosting grandparent-focused open houses
- ✓ Include a grandparent outreach component in special needs schools
- ✓ Support the delivery of mental health services in schools

## Health

- ✓ Routinely screen for depression in custodial grandparents, particularly in those with chronic health problems and/or functional impairments
- ✓ Offer resources and strategies for managing any health limitation that might impact the grandparent's capacity to provide care



## Child Welfare

- ✓ Ensure that case management focuses on positive outcomes for the caregiver as well as the child
- ✓ Provide reassurance that grandchildren will be cared for after they're gone and assist with long term planning, wills and standby guardianship
- ✓ Adjust permanency goals based on the status of guardianship and/or adoption given the context of familial relationships

## Disability Services

- ✓ Ensure access to respite and other services and resources
- ✓ Provide long-term planning information and supports (identifying and funding assisted living options)