

**Informed Is In Style**

Have you read the newspaper today?

# Grandparents called upon to raise grandchildren



Older adults whose children have grown up often look forward to the next stages in life, which may involve retirement, downsizing and enjoying visits with their grandchildren. A growing number of aging adults may find themselves playing a key role in their grandchildren's lives.

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2.7 million grandparents across the country are stepping into parental roles for their grandkids. Some assist their adult children while others have become the primary caregivers. Factors like military deployment, illness, incarceration, and substance abuse are forcing grandparents to take on responsibilities they may have thought were over. PBS reports that, between 2009 and 2016, the number of grandparents raising grandchildren in the United States rose by 7 percent.

Although raising the next generation can bring about many rewards, including security, sense of purpose, a deeper relationship with family, and social interaction, there are many obstacles as well. That includes the financial strain that raising children can place on individuals unprepared for the cost of child-rearing. Census figures also show that

about one-fifth of grandparents caring for children have incomes that fall below poverty level. Grandparents may be rusty concerning safety requirements and equipment now needed to care for grandchildren as well.

As grandparents navigate the unexplored waters of raising grandchildren, there are certain factors they need to consider.

**Legal advice or advocacy**

Certain circumstances may require grandparents to seek legal help so they can raise their grandchildren in lawful ways. If there is neglect, divorce, arrest, or other factors, it may be a smart idea for grandparents to seek the help of an attorney or advocacy group to clarify their legal rights and ensure access to grandchildren. In addition, grandparents may need certain legal documents, such as a power of attorney, citizenship papers, adoption records, or consent forms.

**Get educated**

The rules have changed since grandparents raised their own children. It is important they learn as much as possible on child safety guidelines. Consumer advocacy groups or pediatricians can help explain how guidelines have changed. New furniture and toys that meet current safety guidelines may have to replace older, unsafe items.

**Take care of yourself**

Raising grandchildren can be emotionally taxing, especially if poor circumstances led to the grandchildren being placed with family. It is crucial to recognize feelings and one's own health when caring for others. A grandparent who is exhausted or overwhelmed may not offer the appropriate care. Emphasizing one's own mental and physical health is essential, as is getting help and advice when it's most needed. The organization AARP recommends compiling a list of support services, such as respite care providers, counselors and support groups.

**Grandchildren will have feelings, too**

Children, whether they are old enough to understand or not, may react to change differently. Some children may act out while others may grow detached. Grandparents can focus on providing stable environments and offer support and consistency even if grandchildren are withdrawing or pushing their loved ones away with words or actions.

Raising grandchildren can be complicated, but it has become more prevalent. It can take time for these new family units to find their grooves. More information is available at [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) in their GrandFamilies Guide.

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