



Grandparents

You are not alone!

Where to Start

Are you a grandparent who is concerned about the safety and well-being of your grandchild but you don't know how to help, where to go, or what to do?

Are you a grandparent raising your grandchild, struggling with finances, child care/school issues, or concerned for your own and your grandchild's mental health?

Are you a grandparent already raising your grandchild and you sometimes feel alone, ashamed, guilty, confused, overwhelmed and in need of support?

YOU ARE NOT ALONE and there is help out there! Although this document doesn't hold the answers to all of your questions or concerns, it is hopefully just what you need to get started in the right direction. All you need is to know how to navigate the different systems and advocate for yourself and your grandchild.

Court

To obtain custody of your grandchild, go to the Probate and Family Court where the child lives and request temporary guardianship. In order to get guardianship of the child his or her parent(s) must consent, must be found to be unfit or must be unavailable. The clerk's office will have the paperwork necessary to get you started. You should bring the child's birth certificate with you if you have it.

- Temporary guardianship means temporary. The biological parents have a right to be heard and contest your request. The court will set a date for a hearing.

- If the Probate and Family Court awards you permanent custody of your grandchild, know that permanent does not mean permanent. The biological parent may petition the Court in the future for custody of the child to be returned to him/her.
- There is an attorney-of-the-day at each court.
- It may be helpful to have a lawyer assist you. For lawyer referral information see: www.lawlib.state.ma.us/lawyer/index.html or call the **Senior Legal Helpline at 1-866-778-0939**.
- There are many important differences between being made a guardian of a child by a Probate and Family Court judge and being made a guardian as a result of a placement of a child by the Department of Children and Families. To understand these differences, you may wish to consult a lawyer. To find a lawyer or to get advice, call the **Senior Legal Helpline**.

Finances

If you are the guardian of your grandchild, you are entitled to apply for grantee relative benefits at the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). Call DTA Central Office for more information: **1-800-445-6604**. Eligibility is based on your child's income, not yours! DTA will explain. Bring copies of the guardianship paperwork, proof of residence, and ability to show relationship to the child.

- If your grandchild is under FIVE years old, he/she is eligible for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) which helps with milk, cheese, etc. Call **1-800-WIC-1007** for more information.

- If either biological parent is deceased, the child may be eligible for survivor benefits through Social Security. If your grandchild has a medical or mental health disability, they may qualify as well.
- Your grandchild is eligible for MassHealth insurance! Take advantage of this service! Contact the Department of Early Education and Care for income-eligible child care or day care vouchers at **(617) 988-6600**.

Support

You may feel like you are the only grandparent raising your grandchild, but you are not! Find a local support group for grandparents. Go to www.massgrg.com for listings.

- Maintain good communication with schools, therapists, the court, etc. Good communication benefits you and your grandchild.
- Try to find a child therapist who specializes in child trauma (and accepts MassHealth). For younger children, consider play therapy.
- If your grandchild has been diagnosed with a mental illness and is covered by MassHealth, contact CBHI, or your local Department of Mental Health office.
- If they are struggling at school, you should ask the school for a TEAM evaluation. Your grandchild may qualify for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Make your request in writing!
- Go to www.massgrg.com and the "Grandparents" page for more details.
- For specific questions:
Colleen Pritoni, Program Coordinator
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If the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is involved

If DCF has custody of your grandchild, you have the right to ask to participate in a home study and have your grandchild placed with you as a kinship foster parent. If you become the child's foster parent, you should receive foster care payments, MassHealth for your grandchild, and other services. Contact the child's social worker as soon as possible for more information. For a copy of the Grandparent's Resource Guide, go to www.massgrg.com

Created by the:

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
Information and Referral Subcommittee

Revised April 2016

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