

Through the eyes of a child

# Grandparents raising grandchildren



## Introduction

Over 5.7 million grandchildren lived in homes with grandparents in 2000, according to the United States Census Bureau. In almost half of these families, the grandparents had primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren.

As a grandparent who is raising your grandchild, you have an important responsibility. Your roles as a parent and grandparent may have changed recently, or you may have taken care of the child since birth. In any case, the child you are raising faces unique challenges that you need to think about. This series of nine fact sheets is designed to help you learn more about what to expect.

These fact sheets give grandparents information on several topics. They are different from other resources for grandparents for three reasons:

1. We focus on the young child's perspective (from birth to age 8).
2. We focus on family relationships and child development, not legal or financial issues.
3. We give information that may not be easily found in other places.

Each sheet covers a different topic. We designed the sheets to be used as a collection or one at a time. Each sheet includes a section with questions grandparents can ask themselves. Our goal is to help you think about your own situation and grandchild, rather than giving you advice. We hope that by thinking about your situation, you will know what kinds of help you may need as you care for your grandchild.

### These fact sheets are for you!

These fact sheets are designed for grandparents as well as for professionals who work with grandparents. Grandparents may use the sheets to get information about relationships and child development that is hard to find in other places. Professionals may wish to use the sheets to start discussions in support groups or to give out to grandparents.

### How were these sheets developed?

We developed these fact sheets to help grandparents raising their grandchildren. We used grandparent experiences and research as guides.

Grandparents raising grandchildren are the experts when it comes to their own situations! We also talked to professionals in the area of child development and in the field of aging. And we talked to professionals who work with grandparents raising grandchildren in the community. Grandparents and professionals reviewed and commented on earlier drafts of these fact sheets. Our goal was to make the sheets as useful and accurate as possible.

The following section outlines the content of each fact sheet.



### 1. Understanding children's development

- Individual differences
- Areas of development
- Concerns about children's development
- Special issues for children in kinship care

### 2. The importance of close relationships

- What is attachment?
- Characteristics of positive attachment figures
- Types of attachment relationships
- Developing attachment relationships
- What do healthy relationships mean for a child?
- Culture and attachment

### 3. Relationship expectations: Now and in the future

- What does your grandchild expect?
- Implications for future relationships
- Resilience: From heartbreak to hope
- Relationship pathways

### 4. Disruptions in close relationships: How they affect a child's behaviors, thoughts, and feelings

- What is a disruption?
- Stages of coping
- Setbacks in coping
- How a child handles stress during a disruption
- Resilience: What helps?
- Helping your grandchild cope
- Where to go for help

### 5. The importance of open communication

- Helping your grandchild communicate
- Problems in communication
- How much should you tell young children?
- Behaviors as communication: What is your grandchild trying to tell you?
- Helping grandchildren and their parents stay in touch
- What interferes with open communication?
- Being a role model for your grandchild

### 6. Understanding children's behaviors

- Concerns about children's behaviors
- Common behavior problems
- Warning signs of serious behavior problems
- Suggestions for responding
- Where to go for help
- Parenting styles
- Culture and parenting strategies

### 7. Children's contact with their parents

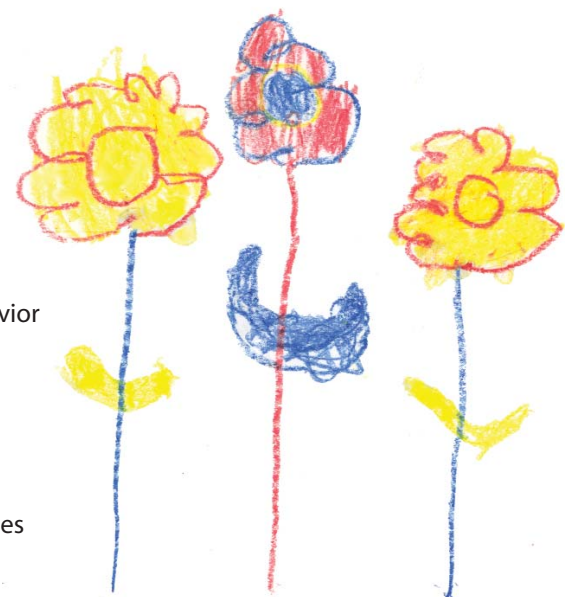
- Each situation is unique
- Alternatives to visits
- Helping children make positive transitions
- Good practices for parent-child contact

### 8. The cycle of family patterns

- Patterns across generations
- Breaking negative family cycles
- Grandparents' thoughts and feelings about close relationships
- The relationship between you and your grandchild
- Other family relationships
- Grandparents' well-being and children's development
- Where to go for help

### 9. Additional resources

- Descriptions of recommended books and web sites that offer more information on topics about grandparents raising grandchildren.



## Credits

### Authors

Julie Poehlmann, Ph. D.  
Assistant Professor  
Human Development and Family  
Studies  
Waisman Center  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Mary Brintnall-Peterson, Ph. D.  
Professor, Family Living Programs  
University of Wisconsin-Extension

Rebecca Schlafer  
Research Intern  
Human Development and Family  
Studies  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Kari Morgan, Ph. D.  
Former Program Specialist  
Family Living Programs  
University of Wisconsin Extension

**Partially funded by:**  
Grant from the Meta Schroeder  
Beckner Endowment  
School of Human Ecology  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Grant from the Children's Health  
System—Child Abuse Prevention  
Fund

### Reviewers:

Luci Bearon, Ph. D.  
Department of Family and  
Consumer Sciences  
North Carolina State University

Linda Cates  
Director of Campaign and  
Communications  
United Way of Portage County

Karen DeBord, Ph. D.  
Human Development  
Department of Family and  
Consumer Sciences  
North Carolina State University

Maryanne Haselow-Dulin  
Editing Services

Cathy Nelson  
Professor Emeritus  
University of Wisconsin-Extension

Susan Saeger  
Program Director, Southern Child  
Welfare Training Partnership  
School of Human Ecology  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Janet Sainer, Special Consultant  
Relatives as Parents Program  
The Brookdale Foundation

### Grandparent groups:

Second Time Around/Mary Dobbs  
Family Resource Center

Grandparents Parenting Again/  
Waukesha Women's Center

Grandparents Raising  
Grandchildren Support Network  
of Winnebago County

### Artists:

William Boyd, age 6  
Catherine DeGuire, age 10  
David Michael DeGuire, age 6  
Isabel Meyer, age 6  
Jenna Sandy, age 6  
Max Sandy, age 7



**Copyright © 2003** by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System doing business as the division of Cooperative Extension of the University of Wisconsin-Extension. Send inquiries about copyright permission to: Manager, Cooperative Extension Publishing, 103 Extension Bldg., 432 N. Lake St., Madison, WI 53706.

Produced by Cooperative Extension Publishing.

**University of Wisconsin-Extension**, Cooperative Extension, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Wisconsin counties, publishes this information to further the purpose of the May 8 and June 30, 1914 Acts of Congress; and provides equal opportunities and affirmative action in employment and programming. If you need this material in an alternative format, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Programs or call Cooperative Extension Publishing at 608-262-2655.

This fact sheet is part of a series. To obtain the rest of the set, visit the University of Wisconsin-Extension grandparenting web site at [www.uwex.edu/relationships/](http://www.uwex.edu/relationships/). For more information about this series, contact Mary Brintnall-Peterson, University of Wisconsin-Extension or Julie Poehlmann, University of Wisconsin-Madison.