

Who Is Looking After Us?

Grandparents as carers



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This book was made possible from funding
under the NSW Investing in Women 2021 funding.



Health
Western Sydney
Local Health District



Education Centre
AGAINST VIOLENCE

When grandparents enter their retirement, they look forward to enjoying life in different ways:

- Relaxing at home; visiting family and friends; going on trips; and joining groups, gym, dance classes, choir, and other activities.
- Usually, this stage involves less financial stress.
- Wellbeing becomes a priority.
- When grandchildren are born, many grandparents are still working and the possibility to commit themselves for part-time or full-time care is quite limited.

"Our children have grown up; let's have fun"

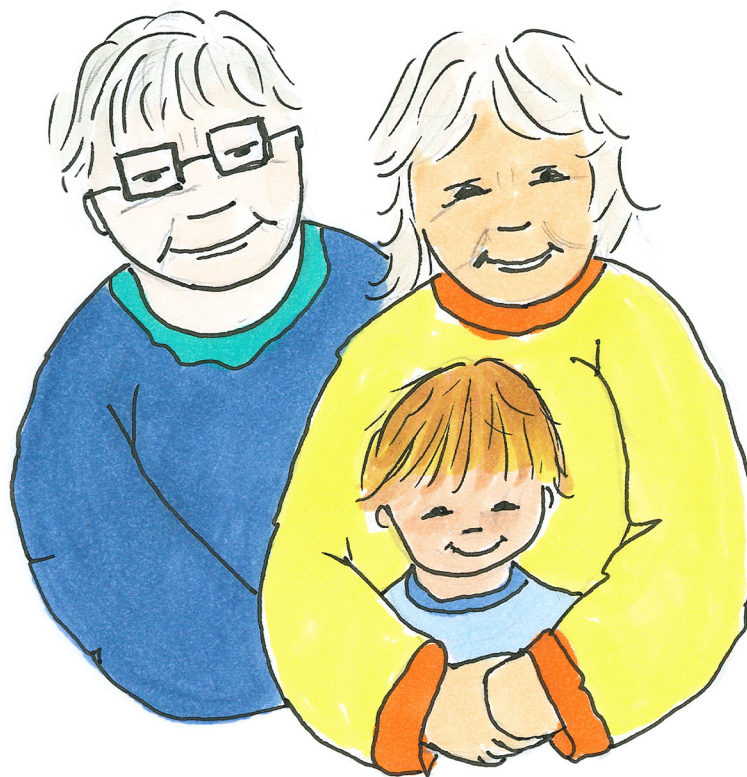


The sudden news that their grandchildren have being removed from their birth or adoptive parents is sometimes not unexpected; however grandparents often don't know when and what is going to happen.

Grandparents:

- May become confused, worried, concerned, and anxious about the challenges that this task brings to their lives.
- Have so many questions, but they don't always know whom to ask; to ask for help means to explain their situation and, in many ways, they may feel ashamed about their family circumstances.
- Are not aware of the length of time their grandchildren will be living with them. It could be for a short time, or they might become permanent carers.
- Love their grandchildren so much that the thought of other living arrangements such as foster care is not an option. However, among many concerns they may worry if they will live long enough to care for their grandchildren.

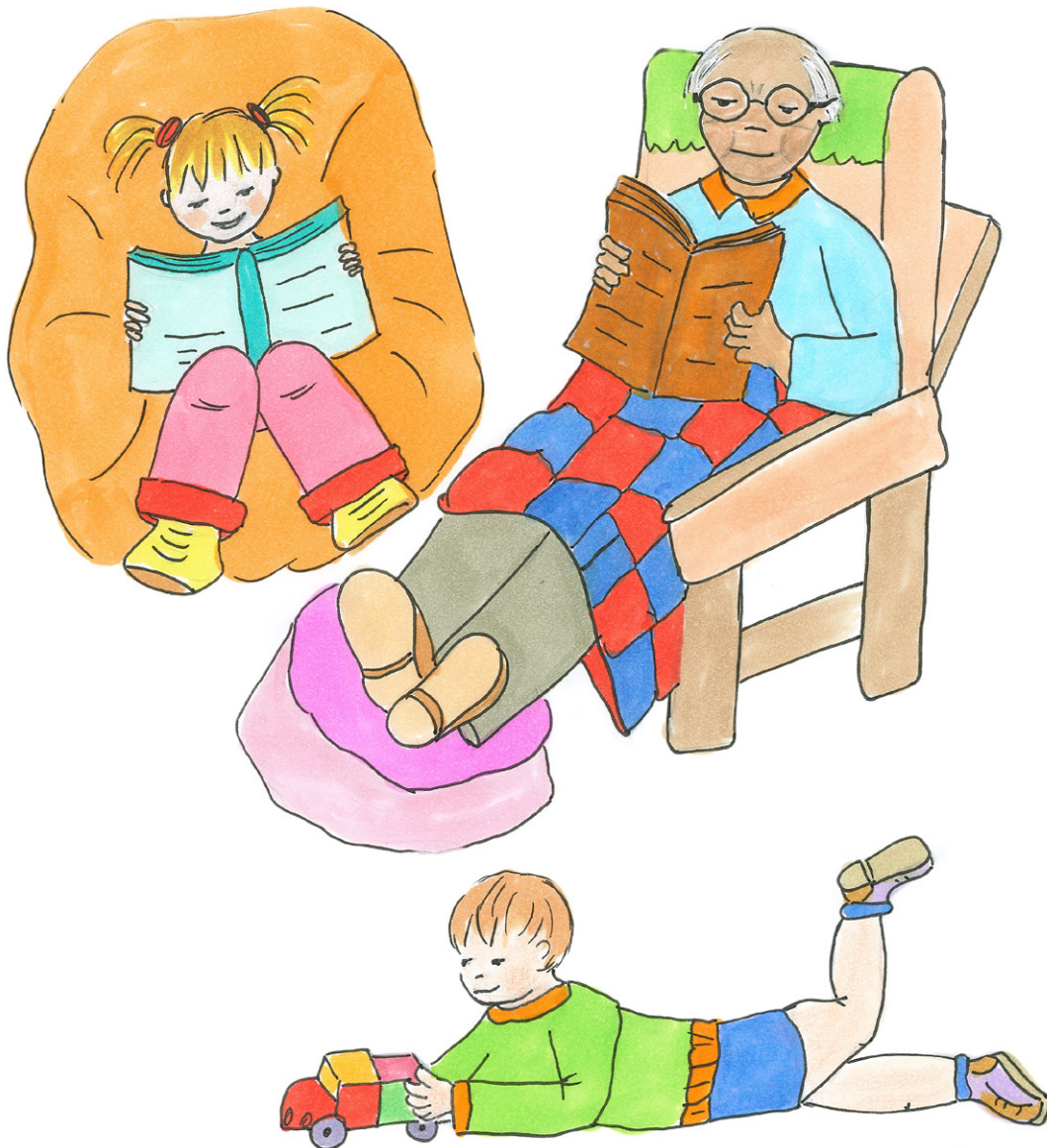
"Raising a family for the second time"



Before children come to live with their grandparents, grandparents often have set routines they enjoy and feel comfortable doing.

- Grandparents are often busy with work, gardening, going shopping, visiting friends, and eating out.
- When assuming care of their grandchildren full-time, the roles in the household change. Grandmother might need greater assistance in completing the tasks that she once undertook around the home, whilst grandfather might need to develop skills he did not have previously. Things like doing housework, shopping on his own, supervising their grandchildren and other tasks.
- There are positive ways of working out the challenges, building up networks of people to help and support, and being open to suggestions.

"Loving and peaceful time"



Children from all ages often can't talk and explain about the way they feel. Sometimes they keep it inside because they don't want to hurt others.

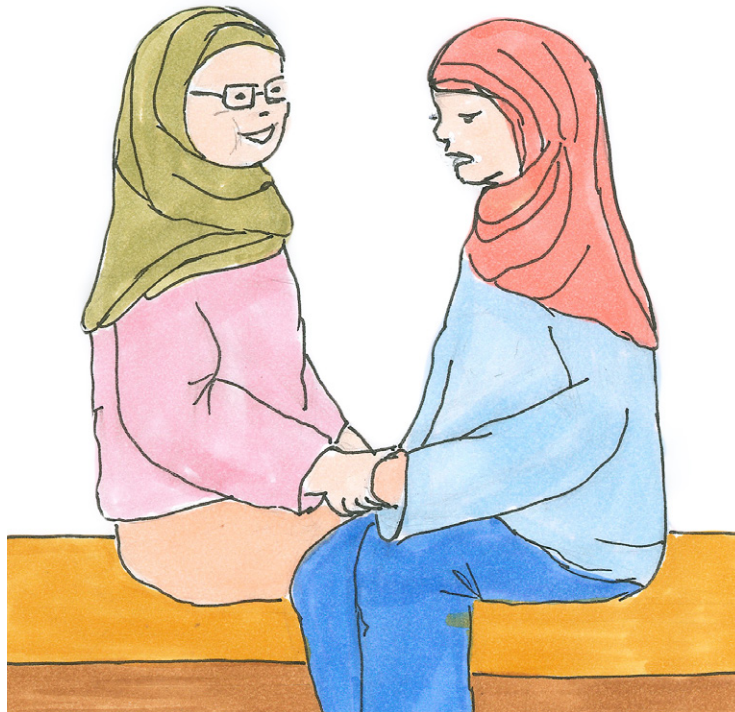
- Most children don't talk about feelings because they don't know how to put words to their feelings.
- Sometimes adults mistake the reasons that children and adolescents don't want to talk so it is important to be cautious when making assumptions.
- For children, it may be easier to say that they feel angry instead of feeling sad, upset, disappointed, confused, frustrated and other similar feelings.
- It is best not to force young children and adolescents to talk; sometimes one way to help them is to hug them and keep silent.
- Another way could be to ask 'Is anything I can do?'

"What to expect for the future"



- For mothers and fathers to lose their children is something they never expected to happen.
- For young children and adolescents to lose and live away from their parents is traumatic and upsetting.
- For grandparents may be extremely concerning to accept the circumstances in which their grandchildren were removed from their parents.
- The reasons for removing children from their birth parents can be drug and alcohol issues, domestic violence, long-term illness, mental health, incarceration, abuse, and neglect.
- Some mothers and fathers feel relieved that their children are in the care of their parents. These arrangements might continue for years, and their relationship will always be relative good.
- At other times mothers and fathers might become angry and or aggressive. They find it hard to accept that their children will stay with their parents.

"We can still have a relationship"



In their roles as a carers, grandparents realise the importance of supporting their grandchildren when doing schoolwork.

- They understand that education has change from the time they went to school and when they raised their children.
- Quite often their level of knowledge in technology is limited, they are able to use smartphones, texting, and some social media, they might also use computers and iPads.
- They want their presence to help their grandchildren feel loved.

"I may not understand homework, but I'm here to support my grandchild"



For grandparents their first priority is to look after their grandchildren and to cover expenses that in the past they never thought they would have to.

- They may experience financial stresses that may affect their physical and mental health.
- They may find themselves in a position where they no longer can spoil their grandchildren by buying toys and other items they ask for.
- They may not ask for help from friends because to do this means they have to explain their family situation; or to ask authorities for help because they may not know where or how to start.
- Their grandchildren might not understand their financial strains and get angry or upset; they might start talking about wanting to go back to their parents.

"Money doesn't grow on trees"



When children leave their parents, they might not understand what is happening. Adults may explain several times but due to their traumatic experiences they may not be able to understand the magnitude of the changes that they are going through.

- Depending on their age, children have different reactions to these new changes. They can develop sleeping problems, nightmares, bed wetting, eating disorders, withdraw, regression, anger, and other emotional and behavioural problems.
- Whilst holding a significant amount of knowledge and experience, grandparents may not know how to manage ongoing difficult behaviours or conversations with their grandchildren about why they were removed from their parents.
- This can leave grandparents feeling frustrated and lost, unsure whether they are able to undertake this new role.

"I don't know what to do"

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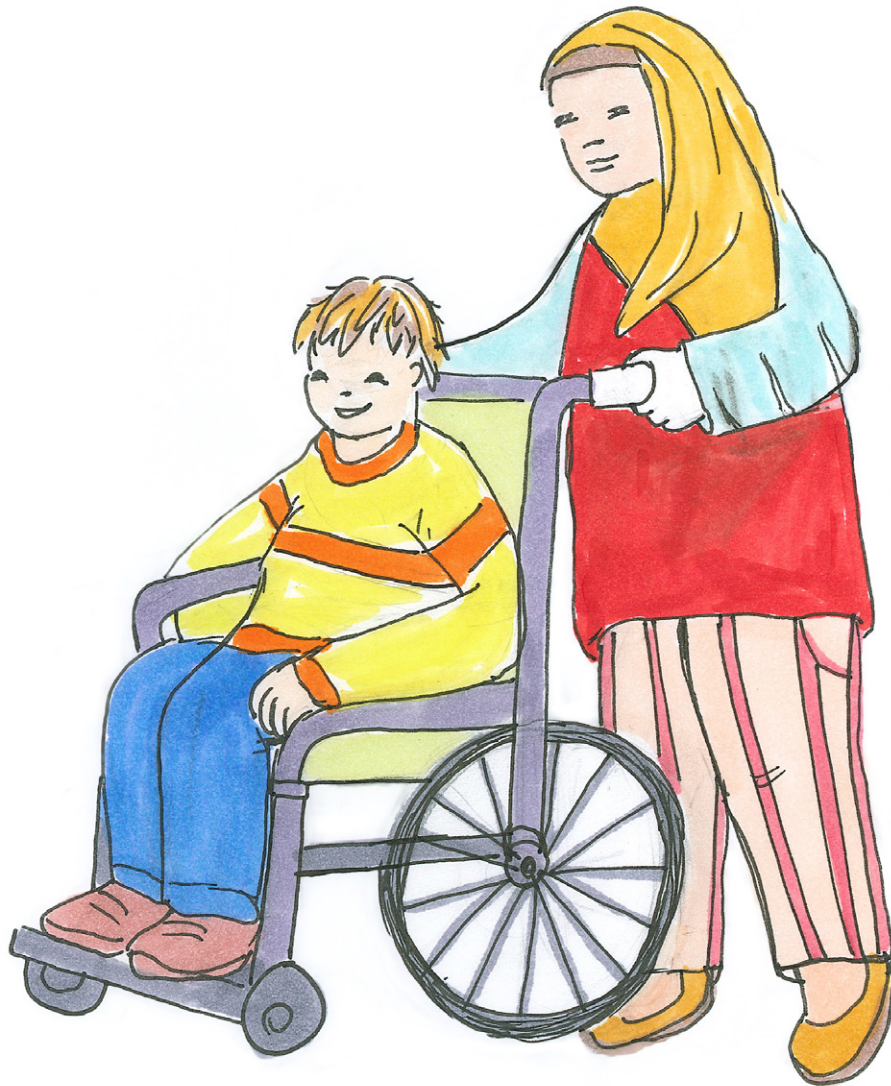


Each child is unique and important in their own right. When grandparents are caring for a grandchild with additional needs or disabilities, they may require further support for their grandchild, themselves, and other grandchildren.

Grandparents:

- Might feel confused about the medical diagnosis given to their grandchild.
- Need further medical support to understand and continue appropriate treatment.
- Might feel overwhelmed in the task of navigating the disability support system and accessing the support services they need.
- Need support to assist other grandchildren in their care.

"I love my grandson;
disability is not an issue"



Sometimes grandparents are given the task to look after their grandchildren; however they are not fully informed where to get help.

- Government departments operate in different ways. Most people have difficulties understanding how they work and processes to follow to obtain support.
- For grandparents, to get additional support can be very hard and confusing because they are not aware of services for children.
- Sometimes communication with their caseworker is not what they expected. Grandparents also may feel uncomfortable asking families or friends for help, so they find themselves isolated and unsure what to do next.

"Where do I start?"

Dept of Education

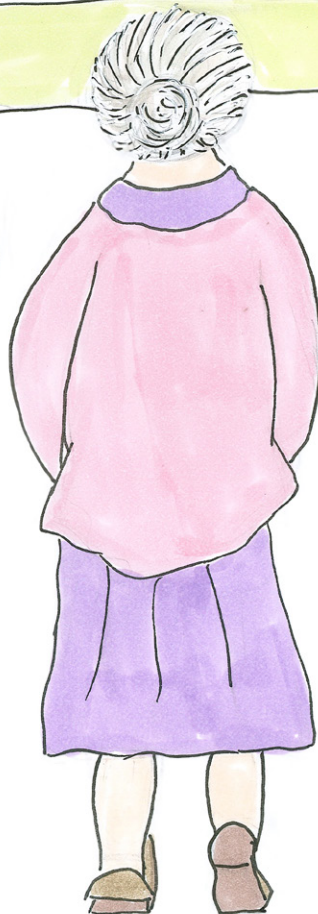
Therapy services

Medicare

GMAR NSW

CentreLink

MyGov



In general, adolescence is a challenging time. This is a period of growth and identity-formation, with behaviour that can be difficult and hard to understand.

- Whilst grandparents might have had a great relationship with their grandchild when they were younger, they may not know how to talk or manage when they reach adolescence.
- Adolescence can be complex, children's behaviour can become argumentative, demanding, disruptive, unsettling. Boundaries may be tested and there are other psychological and emotional changes.
- When the care is a single grandparent looking after young children as well as one or two adolescents, it can be difficult and other services might need to be contacted to obtain more support.
- Adding other services can become a burden because it involves dealing with unknown people.
- At other times adolescent can be of great help in caring for younger siblings.

"What do I do?"



Children might enjoy seeing their parents or may not want to see them at all.

There are different ways for parents to spend time with their children.

- See them unsupervised or with supervision.
- Have set times for phone calls, social media messages or no communication at all.
- For some children having contact with their parents can bring up intense uncomfortable feelings: fear, anger, sadness, attachment issues.
- Some grandparents, might worry about their grandchildren's safety.
- At other times grandparents are happy that parents and their children are having a good time.

"Have a great time"



It is hard for children to understand why they can live with their parents.

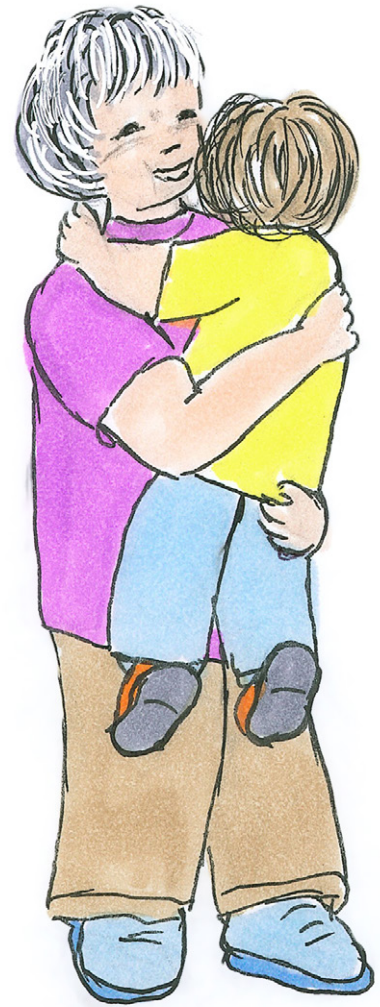
- Is hard for young children to understand why they can't live with their parents.
- They can have many feelings and reactions: anger, sadness, frustration, confusion, grief, and others. Due to their trauma, they are not able to explain what is happening to them.
- They might not want to eat, or constantly eating, have nightmares, wet their bed and other reactions that they didn't have before.
- Adolescents can have same feeling as younger children but is likely that they isolate themselves or spend great deal of time on their phone or/and computers. They might also cry and not tell anyone.

"Nan I am so sad!"



"There will also be time to have fun"







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