

Supporting children: a guide for grandparents

Introduction

If you're looking after your grandchild you are not alone. An estimated 22,500 primary care givers in Australia are grandparents. One of the reasons why grandparents are put in this situation is because their children have problems with alcohol or other drugs. This can be difficult for everyone involved. The grandchildren may feel alone and unloved. They often don't understand why their parents can't look after them.

As a grandparent it's common to feel angry, hurt and powerless, but it's important to remember that you can help yourself and your grandchildren.

Two important facts

- You did not cause your son or daughter's alcohol or other drug problems. Neither did your grandchildren.
- You and your grandchildren can't cure your child's alcohol or other drug problems, but you can encourage them to seek treatment and support.

Supporting your grandchildren

- Talk to your grandchildren and make sure they know that they can always talk to you.
- Help your grandchildren feel as if your home is their home by making room for them and their belongings.
- Avoid trying to make up for what has happened by giving the children excessive treats or surprises, or making allowances for unacceptable behaviour. Children need to understand clear limits, rules and consequences.
- Set up a daily routine for them to follow, such as regular meal times and bed times. Establishing a routine can help make it easier for children to deal with stressful events.
- Make sure you reward good behaviour as well as correcting behaviour that causes problems.
- Avoid physical punishment. Smacking children shows them that aggression and anger are normal ways of solving problems.
- Aim to make your consequences logical and appropriate. Link the punishment to the behaviour. For example if the child throws all their books on the floor, ask them to put them back on the bookcase. Make the consequences immediate, as this will have more impact.

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Supporting your children

Try to provide support to your child rather than judging or criticising them. Criticising your child in front of your grandchildren may only result in them both feeling worse and becoming defensive.

Avoid contributing to the situation by making excuses for them, paying their bills or apologising for them. Support your child not their drug use.

Try to avoid verbal and/or physical confrontation with your child it will only worsen, not help, the situation. If you have fears for your own or your family's safety, you should contact the police. You can discuss the possibility of taking out an intervention order.

Supporting yourself

It can be difficult raising grandchildren, especially when you are getting older and may have your own health problems. The issues related to drug use in the family can further complicate things, creating difficult relationships with family members and friends. Relationships can be further strained when legal proceedings are involved. Grandparents often need to formalise their roles through legal avenues to access government subsidies to support their grandchildren.

With this in mind, it's important to get support for yourself:

- Talk with a friend or counsellor. This may help to clarify things in your mind and help you to work out how to handle the situation.
- Join a support group. Sharing your thoughts and experiences with other people who are facing or have faced the same issues, can help you to cope better and feel less isolated.
- Familiarise yourself with the relevant drug and its effects. Understanding how it works and why people become dependent on drugs will help you understand what your child is going through.
- Try to balance supporting your child with making sure the grandchildren are safe, happy and secure.
- Look after yourself, both physically and mentally. It's important to look after yourself so you can be a good carer and can support your grandchildren.

References for this fact sheet are available at: Druginfo.adf.org.au

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Further Information

- Information on alcohol and different drugs: druginfo.adf.org.au
- Family Drug Help: familydrughelp.org.au
- Family Drug Support: fds.org.au
- Mirabel Foundation: mirabelfoundation.org.au

Go to druginfo.adf.org.au

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Page 3 / 3

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