

Getting the Child You Love the Educational Support They Need

As a grandparent, other relative, or family friend raising a child whose parents are unable to do so, your focus is making sure the child in your care feels protected, loved, and supported. That includes finding the support they need to succeed in school. These tips, reviewed by caregivers with lived experience, aim to help you do just that.

- ▶ **To register the child for school, contact your local school and find out what paperwork is needed.** The school's McKinney Vento liaison or a kinship-serving organization may be able to help you understand and obtain [documentation](#) showing that you have decision-making authority for the child, which may be a requirement for enrollment.
- ▶ **Make sure school personnel understand your role.** You can decide who to tell and what to say. Something like, "My grandchild is living with me because her parents can't care for her right now" is a good start. You can schedule a one-on-one meeting or invite the child's teacher to ask you questions and alert you if the child is having a hard time academically or emotionally. The school guidance counselor may be able to provide counseling and support for the child and may connect you to additional resources for your family. It's also good to share any challenges at home that might be getting in the way of learning, such as a lack of Internet access or a struggle with homework.
- ▶ **If you're worried that the child in your care is slow to develop skills typical for their age, ask your local school district about Child Find.** (For a young child, [developmental milestones](#) might include learning to walk or talk. For an older child, you might ask for help if they're struggling academically or having trouble managing their emotions.) Children from birth to the age of 21 are eligible for free testing from Child Find. You may also request the services of the school psychologist to get the child tested. For information on the process and the services offered, visit <https://tinyurl.com/EDforKin> or <https://www.understood.org/>.
- ▶ **Build a support network at the child's school.**
 - **Help school staff get to know the child.** Write a one-page document describing the child's likes/dislikes, behaviors, strengths, and challenges, and what works and doesn't work at home. This document can prepare teachers and counselors before the school year. Be sure to point out what makes the child unique, such as their love of dinosaurs, ability to make the perfect grilled cheese, or amazing patience with a younger sibling.
 - **Be present.** Volunteering at school or attending events is a great way to get to know staff and be a presence in the child's world. For many kin caregivers, finding this time is a challenge. Do what you can to stay connected in the time you have. Engage with teachers or other school staff at morning drop-off. Send a note when things are going well. Building a friendly relationship with school staff *now* helps if an issue arises *later*.
 - **Find out who to talk to and how to reach them to resolve issues and concerns.** If you and the child's teacher are unable to resolve an issue, seek out the guidance counselor,

school social worker, psychologist, or principal. Find out whether school staff prefer a phone call, an email, or an in-person appointment. Keep in mind that the start and end of each school day are as hectic for them as they are for you.

- **Recognize other school staff who connect with the child in your care.** The school secretary, safety officer, or custodian can make the difference in a child's day. Get to know the people who call the child by name and introduce yourself as the child's caregiver.
 - **Assume good intentions, but be prepared to ask for what the child needs – sometimes more than once.** Take notes with dates, times, and names during phone calls and meetings with school staff so you can keep track of what should happen next and who's responsible. It's okay to call to ask a question or if a deadline passes without action. Make your voice heard while remaining calm and respectful. Keep a log of actions requested and steps taken.
- ▶ **Don't overlook help from other caregivers.** Seek out experienced caregivers to tap into their knowledge on collaborating with school staff.
- **Bring another adult with you to important school meetings.** A therapist, advocate, family member, or friend can take notes, ask questions, and help you feel less overwhelmed.
 - **Check out nonprofits that provide information, resources, and trainings for families, such as parent advocacy groups, kinship support groups, and children's advocacy agencies** (including [The Arc](#)). The school counselor or secretary may be able to help you find these groups. If no kinship support groups are available, consider asking the school for assistance in contacting other caregivers and using school facilities to start one.

Technical Assistance Tip for Professionals Working with Kinship/Grandfamilies:

For more information, please see the [GrandFacts fact sheets for grandfamilies](#) and other relevant Network monthly two-pagers, such as those on [educational access](#) (which includes information on support for children with disabilities), [first steps for grandfamilies](#), and [legal options for caregivers](#).

The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit www.GKSNetwork.org.

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