

## Monthly Resource: December 2022

# Home for the Holidays

## Staying Connected

Adult friendships and social gatherings often get put aside when children unexpectedly join your household. Holidays may feel overwhelming because of changes in family dynamics and routines. And that can be lonely.

When grandparents and other kin caregivers become a child's primary caregiver, it's common to feel isolated or apart from the life and friendships they had "before." Especially around the holidays, when reality doesn't quite match what is shown in ads and made-for-TV movies: Perfect houses. No family arguments or no-shows.

What can grandfamily/kin caregivers do to feel less isolated?

▶ **Connect with others.**

You are not alone. More than 1½ million children of all ages in the U.S. are being raised by grandparents. A million more are being raised by aunts, uncles, and other kin caregivers. Many families find connection with other caregivers who understand what they're going through.

*"At retirement age, you know, you have a lot of friends that you make plans with. When our grandkids joined our family, those friends just basically went away...we don't have that closeness we had planned on. Now, our friends are people raising their grandchildren...and it's just a beautiful community."*

– Keith Lowhorne, GRAND Voice Caregiver Advocate

To find groups in your area, visit [www.GKSNetwork.org/grandfacts-fact-sheets/](http://www.GKSNetwork.org/grandfacts-fact-sheets/). No groups in your area? To start one, try reaching out to your [local Y](#), [Area Agency on Aging](#), [Cooperative Extension office](#), [Family Resource Center](#), public library, school, place of worship, or mental health provider. Consider connecting with other families to start a monthly gathering for coffee.

▶ **Start new traditions.**

Traditions give kids a sense of connectedness to family and culture. If old family traditions no longer feel quite right, find new ways to celebrate together.

You can cook a special dish. Watch a classic family movie together. Visit the local Christmas light displays and sing carols. (Bring hot cocoa in a thermos.) Bake cookies and deliver them to someone special. Tell children stories about "when they were little." Read aloud from their favorite book.

▶ **Give yourself the gift of time.**

According to an old saying, you can't get water from an empty well. You can take better care of others when you take care of yourself. Think about activities you enjoyed before the children joined your family. What can you do to make sure those remain a part of your life? It could be a daily walk with a neighbor or a chat with a friend after everybody's in bed. Try setting up a babysitting swap or get-together with another kinship/grandfamily in your community. Avoid taking on more than you can handle, and don't be too hard on yourself for not getting it all done. Stay positive for yourself and the children in your care.

▶ **Reach out for help.**

Providing a safe and secure home for your grandkids or other kin children can be joyful and rewarding. It can also be enormously challenging, as you juggle obligations and struggle with your own feelings of worry, grief, and loss. You should not be alone in your worries. For resources—peer support, financial help, housing, etc.—in your state or territory, visit [www.GKSNetwork.org/grandfacts-fact-sheets/](http://www.GKSNetwork.org/grandfacts-fact-sheets/).

**Best Practice Tip**

*Are you a professional working with kinship/grandfamilies? Ask grandparents and other kin/grandfamily caregivers how they are managing the transition to full-time caring for children. Share this resource with them. Encourage them to find peer support. Make referrals as needed. Finally, let grandparents and other kin/grandfamily caregivers know that their best is all children need—loving, consistent care is tremendous.*

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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](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

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