THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

Kinship Caregiving: You Are Not the Only One

Caregiver Wellness & Support · Build Your Support Circle

National information for grandparents and relatives raising children, and where the state-specific supports live.

IN THIS GUIDE

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- Naming the role clearly
- What you can reasonably ask for
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A free guide from My Fairy GodParents — for youth impacted by parental incarceration, justice-impacted youth, and the caregivers and families who support them.
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint

Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.

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THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

Kinship caregivers — grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, godparents, close family friends — are raising a very large share of the children whose parents are incarcerated, and yet the everyday language of schools, clinics, and programs is still built around parents. That mismatch makes many kinship caregivers feel like an exception, when the numbers say they are common.

Feeling like the only one has a real cost. It keeps people from asking questions they are entitled to ask, from correcting a form that lists them as "grandmother" when they need to be listed as the responsible adult, and from walking into a support group that was built for exactly their situation.

This lesson is about naming what you are doing clearly, knowing what you can reasonably ask institutions for, and finding the other caregivers who are doing the same thing a few streets over. None of it requires you to have the perfect legal paperwork first.

YOU ARE ONE OF MANY, NOT A SPECIAL CASE

Relative caregivers raising children while a parent is incarcerated or otherwise unavailable exist in nearly every school, every clinic, and every neighborhood. Some arrangements are formal, arranged through a court or agency; most are informal, arranged inside the family with no paperwork at all. Both kinds are kinship care, and both are common.

Because kinship caregiving is usually invisible — it does not come with a sign, a badge, or an announcement — the institutions around you often default to assuming a child's household looks like a two-parent home. That default is a gap in their system, not a sign that your situation is unusual.

Knowing this changes how you walk into a school office or a pediatrician's waiting room. You are not asking for a special favor when you ask a form to be corrected or a policy to be explained. You are asking a common situation to be treated as the common situation it is.

NAMING THE ROLE CLEARLY

A vague description of your relationship to a child creates confusion at exactly the moments you need clarity — a school pickup, an urgent care visit, a request for records. Practice one sentence you can say the same way every time: "I am [name]'s grandmother and I am the person raising her day to day." Simple, consistent, and it does not require explaining why.

You do not owe anyone the family story. Staff at a school or clinic need to know who you are in relation to the child and what you are authorized to do, not what happened to the parents. If someone pushes for more, you can say plainly that you would rather keep it to what is relevant.

Naming the role also matters for you. Some kinship caregivers avoid the word "caregiver" or hesitate to say "I am raising him" because it can feel like displacing the parent, even temporarily and even when the parent would say the same thing. Using the plain language is not disloyalty. It is accuracy, and accuracy gets children faster help.

+ WHAT YOU CAN REASONABLY ASK FOR

From a school: to be listed as a contact and emergency contact, to receive the same communications a parent would receive, to know what document the district requires to confirm your role, and to ask what supports exist for a child dealing with a parent's absence. Exactly which document is required and what it authorizes varies by state and district, so ask the registrar or family liaison by name rather than guessing.

From a clinic or pediatrician's office: to know what authorization is needed for you to consent to routine and urgent care, to be the person the office calls, and to have that noted clearly in the child's chart. Some offices will accept a simple caregiver's authorization affidavit; others require more. Ask the front desk what their office specifically needs, since this differs by state and sometimes by practice.

From programs and services — afterschool care, camps, tutoring, sports, faith-based youth programs: to be treated as the enrolling adult without having to explain the family's history, and to ask directly whether the program has any reduced-cost or scholarship option for kinship or foster families, since many do but do not advertise it.

It is reasonable to ask any of these plainly and more than once if the first answer is vague. "What exactly do you need from me to make this official" is a normal, expected question, not an imposition.

+ WHERE THE PEER SUPPORT ACTUALLY IS

Kinship navigator programs exist in many states specifically to orient relative caregivers — they explain paperwork, benefits, and local resources in one call, and are often the fastest way to stop guessing. 211 can tell you whether one exists where you live and connect you directly.

211 is also the general front door to local caregiver and kinship support groups, both in person and virtual, along with respite care, food assistance, and childcare help. Say the words "kinship care" specifically when you call; it is the standard term and it routes you faster.

Beyond formal programs, look for kinship caregiver support groups run by local nonprofits, faith communities, or Area Agencies on Aging (many serve grandparents raising grandchildren specifically). These groups exist precisely so you are not explaining your situation from scratch to people who have never

lived it.

+ CORRECTING ONE WORD ON A FORM

A grandmother raising her two grandsons had been listed on every school form as "Grandparent — Emergency Contact," which meant the school called their mother first for every decision, even though their mother had not lived with them in over a year and the grandmother was the one packing lunches and signing permission slips.

She asked the registrar directly what document the district used to make her the primary contact and decision-maker for school purposes. The registrar pulled up a caregiver authorization form the grandmother had never been told about, and the correction took fifteen minutes.

She later said the hardest part had never been the form itself. It was believing that asking to be listed correctly was something she was allowed to do without a lawyer or a long explanation.

+ WORDS YOU CAN USE

Naming your role to a new contact

Use with a teacher, doctor's office, or program intake.

“I'm [child's name]'s [relationship] and I'm the person raising him day to day. What do you need from me to have that reflected in your records?”

Asking a school what document you need

Say to the registrar or family liaison.

“I'd like to be listed as the primary contact and decision-maker for school purposes. Can you tell me exactly which document your district requires from a relative caregiver, and where I get it?”

Asking a clinic about medical authorization

Say at a pediatrician's front desk.

“I'm the relative raising this child full-time. What do you need on file so I can consent to routine and urgent care and be the one your office calls?”

Finding a kinship navigator or peer group through 211

Say when you call 211.

“I'm a relative raising a child full-time. Is there a kinship navigator program in my state, and is there a kinship or relative caregiver support group near me, in person or online?”

GET SEEN AND GET CONNECTED

- [ ] Practice one plain sentence naming your role and use it consistently.
- [ ] Ask your child's school which document makes you the official school contact.
- [ ] Ask your pediatrician's office what they need to list you as the authorizing adult.
- [ ] Ask any program or activity whether they have a reduced-cost option for kinship or relative caregivers.
- [ ] Call 211 and ask by name for a kinship navigator program.
- [ ] Call 211 and ask for a kinship or relative caregiver support group, in person or online.
- [ ] Check whether a local Area Agency on Aging serves grandparent caregivers in your area.
- [ ] Attend one peer group at least twice before deciding whether it fits.
- [ ] Keep the names and numbers of two people or offices who now have your role correctly on file.

REFLECT AND WRITE

Where in my child's life is my role still recorded incorrectly or vaguely?

What is one place I have avoided asking a direct question because I assumed the answer would be no?

Have I said the plain sentence naming my role out loud this month?

What is the one call I will make this week — to 211, a school, or a clinic?

YOUR NEXT STEP

> Call or search your state child-welfare agency for kinship supports and note one program to ask about.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Written by My Fairy GodParents — reviewed August 2026.
Official reference: Administration for Children and Families (HHS) — linked for the official rules and forms, which MFGP does not set.
https://www.acf.hhs.gov/
This is general information and practice guidance — not legal advice, mental-health treatment, or a statement of any court, agency, or facility's rules. Policies differ by state, county, facility, school, and program, so always confirm details with the office involved.
For decisions with legal, medical, financial, or clinical consequences, work with a licensed professional or the organizations listed with each resource.

You do not have to do this alone.

More free guides, scripts, and checklists:
myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint