



Grand Connections

Facilitator's Guide

A workshop series for grandparents caring for children ages birth to five



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

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ABOUT ZERO TO THREE

ZERO TO THREE works to ensure all infants and toddlers benefit from the family and community connections critical to their well-being and development. Since 1977, the organization has advanced the proven power of nurturing relationships by transforming the science of early childhood into helpful resources, practical tools and responsive policies for millions of parents, professionals, and policymakers.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Kathy is the senior manager of parent resources at ZERO TO THREE. She has 4 decades of experience as an educator and producer of nonfiction media for parents, teachers, and children. Her early experience as an elementary classroom teacher and reading specialist laid the groundwork for a career that has focused on early literacy and educational equity. Roles range from her Emmy-winning work as a producer on the PBS series Reading Rainbow to director of curriculum and instruction for the nonprofit Roads to Success, a college and careers program serving low-income middle and high school students in three states. At ZERO TO THREE, Kathy edits the monthly Baby Steps newsletter and has written a variety of parenting and grandparenting articles. She has produced videos on topics ranging from Head Start's Early Learning Outcomes Framework to ZIKA prevention, as well as profiles of families in which grandparents share in child care. She holds a master's degree in education/reading from Bowling Green State University and a master's degree in television, radio, and film from Syracuse University.

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Rebecca serves as senior director of programs at ZERO TO THREE, a national nonprofit focused on promoting the healthy development of children from birth to 3 years old, where she directs a portfolio of federally and privately funded projects related to healthy child development and high-quality teaching and caregiving for children from birth to 5. Rebecca has co-authored four parenting education curricula and developed parenting resources on various topics and in various formats (including an app, podcasts, and videos). Rebecca's written work has appeared in a variety of publications, including the *ZERO TO THREE Journal* and the peer-reviewed *Young Children*, journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. She has also spoken widely, both within the U.S. and internationally, on topics including brain development, early literacy and language development, parent coaching, children and media, and more. Rebecca holds a master's degree in education and human development, with a concentration in infant-toddler special education, from the George Washington University, where she is currently serving as adjunct faculty.

SPECIAL THANKS

We are indebted not only to the grandparents who participated in ZERO TO THREE's focus groups and national survey but also to the following experts who reviewed early drafts of this material and helped connect us with pilot sites:

- Ana Beltran, JD, Generations United
- Alison Caliendo, PhD, Foster Kinship, NV
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- Maureen O'Leary, National Council on Aging
- Andrew Russo, MA, National Family Support Network

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- Childcare Resource Center, Opelika, AL
- Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development, Athens, OH
- The Family Place, Logan, UT
- Family Resource Center, Isla Vista Youth Projects, Goleta, CA
- Foster Kinship, Las Vegas, NV
- Kinship Cherish FRC, Encompass Pediatric Therapy Clinic, North Bend, WA
- Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest, Phoenix, AZ



BACKGROUND

Why Talk about Grandparent Care? Why Now?

The U.S. Census Bureau¹ reports that one out of four children under age 5 is cared for by a grandparent while parents work or go to school. Grandparents play a critical role in a fragile child care system in which care for children under the age of 5 is often unaffordable or unavailable.

According to ZERO TO THREE's national survey of grandparents who provide regular child care for children ages 5 and under², 98% of the respondents love being a grandparent, and 94% love their role as part-time caregiver. Although eight out of 10 receive no financial compensation, they say they're rewarded in many other ways—such as the ability to be present for and participate in their grandchild's early years.

Figuring out how to approach shared care of a dearly loved grandchild can also be a challenge. In nearly half the families we surveyed, respondents indicated disagreement between grandparents and parents over issues like managing challenging behavior, mealtimes, sleep, or use of screens. In families where three generations share a household, the percentage of grandparents who reported disagreements rises to 57%.

Parents report similar issues. In a national poll conducted by the University of Michigan in 2020,³ nearly half of parents of children ages 18 and under reported disagreeing with their child's grandparents over issues like discipline (57%), meals (44%), and TV/screen time (36%). The poll's co-director, Sarah Clark, describes the conflict this way:

Parents may feel that their parental authority is undermined when grandparents are too lenient in allowing children to do things that are against family rules, or when grandparents are too strict in forbidding children to do things that parents have okayed.

Clark also cites intergenerational differences—past practices versus current ones— as a potential source of conflict.⁴ Although 71% of the grandparents surveyed by ZERO TO THREE feel confident in caring for grandchildren based on their own experience as parents, four in 10 (41%) agree that new research about child development can help them do a better job. Almost a third (30%) wish they knew more about the brain development of young children.⁵

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2013). Who's minding the kids? Child care arrangements: Spring 2011. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p70-135.pdf>

² ZERO TO THREE. (2019). The grand plan: Executive summary. Retrieved from <https://www.zerotothree.org/re-sources/2889-the-grand-plan-executive-summary>

³ "Half of parents report butting heads with child's grandparent over parenting." Science Daily, August 2020, August 17. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/08/200817104303.htm>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ZERO TO THREE, op. cit.

PROGRAM DESIGN

The Grand Connection

The *Grand Connections* workshop series is designed to reflect and respond to the lived experiences of families who share child care between generations. The curriculum is flexible enough to meet the needs of different family situations: There are two versions of Workshops 1 and 2, one for families in which grandparents serve as full-time caregivers/custodians of their young grandchildren and one for grandparents who share the care with their grandchild’s parent(s).

Program goals include the following:

- **Increase grandparent knowledge of research-based child-rearing practices** like sleep, feeding/picky eating, screen media use, limit-setting, and early learning.
- **Provide grandparents with easy-to-use, effective tools for “sharing the care”** or navigating caregiving expectations with their adult children and their partners.
- **Offer grandparents the opportunity to build a strong social support network** with peers who also provide care to grandchildren.

Grand Connections consists of seven, 90-minute group meetings. Each workshop includes 60 minutes of content specifically designed for grandparent discussion and learning, and 30 minutes allocated to a grandparent–grandchild activity. If you wish to provide only the grandparent component, sessions will be 60 minutes long.

Topics covered in *Grand Connections* workshops include:

- Grandparents: The Cornerstone of Early Child Care (two versions for custodial care providers and part-time care providers)
- Sharing the Care (two versions, same as above)
- Good Night, Sleep Tight
- Managing Challenging Behavior: Closing the Expectations Gap
- Making Sense of Screens
- Making the Most of Mealtimes
- Learning Through Play: Making the Most of Everyday Routines



LEADING GRAND CONNECTIONS WORKSHOPS

Approach

The *Grand Connections* program is based on a Parent Café approach. Cafés tap into the collective wisdom that is present in every community and are centered around reflection and discussion, with facilitators participating in—but not driving—the conversations and learning. Because grandparents and professionals are regarded as equals in the Café model, they can build authentic relationships and partnerships that invite collaboration toward common learning goals. As grandparents and facilitators identify issues and find ways to address them, they grow together as they commit to individual action, collective action, and personal growth.⁶

Facilitators

A skilled facilitator is energetic, positive, compassionate, and authentic. The facilitator:⁷

- Welcomes participants and creates a respectful and safe environment;
- Conveys the message that we are all “works in progress,” and that there are no right or wrong answers;
- Communicates that each session is an opportunity to learn from each other and share wisdom;
- Honors the contributions of everyone in the room; and
- Creates a safe space for participants to share information that may be sensitive.

Facilitators can work to elevate parents’ voices during meetings by:

- Balancing the need to move through the agenda with letting families drive the conversation;
- Tolerating ambiguity—allowing grandparents to explore a challenging issue together before jumping in; and
- Integrating key content into the conversation organically and as needed.

It’s helpful if facilitators have a background in social work or early childhood education, as these fields offer the best background for framing learning within the context of free-flowing, reflective discussion. Each workshop includes links to reference articles for those in need of more information.

We recommend that two facilitators co-lead the program.

⁶ Whiteman, J., Bohlander, A., & Abdullah, C. S. (2014). *Caring conversations café model facilitator guide*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.

⁷ Ibid.

Duty to Disclose

It is possible that a participant may reference a disciplinary practice they use that is considered abusive and/or neglectful. Your state or jurisdiction may require that professionals working with families or children report suspected child abuse or neglect. It is critical that facilitators understand and **share their state or jurisdiction's reporting requirements with families at the outset of the *Grand Connections* programs.** Your team should be clear on what is reportable and should ensure that participants have a clear understanding as well. It is important that all participants are made aware of the program's child protective services policies.

Group Size

To ensure that all participants have ample opportunities to speak, a group size of no more than 10 participants is recommended.

Recruitment

In settings not currently operating programs for grandparents, recruitment will likely require community outreach. It may be easier to recruit custodial grandparents to attend the *Grand Connections* series, as they may already be connected to systems (like early care and education, early intervention, or others) that make outreach easier and be eager for support and information. Unlike custodial grandparents, grandparents who are sharing the care are unlikely to self-identify or seek help, and they are less likely to be the primary contact point for services like child care, early intervention, or health care. Recruitment might be done successfully by networking with parents of young children, through community announcements, or through social media posts or advertisements. **See page 13 for sample recruitment materials. Note: materials are customizable based on the name of your program, location, meeting times, and incentives offered.**

Because the average age of first-time grandparenthood is 50, grandparents of young children may not be found in programs for seniors, as many are still working full-time. *Grand Connections* pilot sites advise allowing a long period to advertise and recruit. One facilitator wished she'd "oversubscribed" the workshop, to allow for a dropout or two once the program was underway.

Retention

Several strategies can increase retention of enrolled participants across the workshop series:

- Scheduling in-person meetings to coincide with a meal or snack (provided by the site) can increase retention. Scheduling sessions so that they do not overlap with typical grandchild naptimes (e.g., 1:30-3:00 p.m.) can also increase retention.
- Pilot sites found it helpful to send texts or emails to remind grandparents of upcoming meetings.
- Creating a private Facebook or email group for the workshop series and reaching out to participants between meetings can build a sense of community and help increase retention.

Incentives

During the pilot phase of the program, sites offered participants incentives for attending. These included gift cards for signing up, for attending a particular number of sessions, and/or for program completion. Some sites chose to raffle off a prize at each meeting; for example, a basket or gift bag of self-care items.

Additional Considerations for Online Workshops

Sites offering workshops remotely will want to consider what kind of technical assistance they'll need—for themselves or the participants—in advance of, and during, workshop sessions. Some lessons learned from pilot sites include the following:

- Set aside time before or at the beginning of the first workshop to review the use of your online platform.
 - If applicable to the online platform, instruct the participants to “rename” themselves using their preferred name.
 - Show the participants how to mute themselves to avoid background noise and how to unmute themselves when they want to talk.
 - Ensure participants know how to activate their cameras to facilitate face-to-face interactions.
- Share guidance on using your online platform with attendees by email or in print before the first class. One site found it helpful to be available 30 minutes before the designated meeting time in order to troubleshoot technology issues for early arrivals.
- If possible, designate a second facilitator to address technology issues during each workshop via chat or phone.

You may also wish to partner with an organization such as Older Adult Technology Services (OATS)/ Senior Planet to provide advance troubleshooting through their hotline (<https://seniorplanet.org/>).

Sites delivering the program online will also need to consider how to approach the grandparent-grandchild activity in each workshop. Delivering the read-aloud activity and its follow-up activity may not be feasible for an online audience. Some online adaptations for the grandparent-grandchild activity include the following:

- Facilitators can introduce the book and art activity so that grandparents can complete it at home. They can follow up by sending the book title and activity instructions to grandparents by email.
- One pilot site mailed copies of each book and art supplies to participants' homes and assigned the grandparent-grandchild activities as “homework”; participants shared their experiences with the story/activity during the following meeting.

Additional Considerations for In-Person Workshops

Create an atmosphere that is warm and welcoming to all, including grandfathers. It may help to have a grandfather as a co-facilitator to encourage and support grandfather participation. If plan-

ning in-person meetings, you'll want to think about offering accommodations like those below that make it easy for grandfamilies to attend:

- Onsite child care for grandchildren during the discussion portion of the program
- Snacks or a meal
- Subway/bus passes, carfare, or gas money, if needed

SPOTLIGHT ON CUSTODIAL GRANDPARENTS

Grandfamilies

More than 1.6 million children are being raised by grandparents with no parent present in the home.⁸

Families headed by grandparents are often referred to as *grandfamilies* or *skipped-generation households* when parents are not present. Custodial child care provided by family members other than parents is also described as kinship care. The challenges for custodial grandparents—that is, grandparents who are raising grandchildren without a parent present—are greater than for those grandparents providing part-time care. Families in skipped-generation households are more likely to live below the federal poverty line: 32%, compared with 17% of families in parent-child households.⁹ Custodial grandparents are also likely to experience other challenges such as stress and fatigue related to full-time child-rearing, difficulties navigating the health care and education systems on behalf of their grandchild, and possibly grief and anger over circumstances that led to their custodial role.¹⁰ Separation from a parent is a traumatic experience itself, but grandchildren may also have experienced trauma before being separated from their parent, such as exposure to substance misuse, family or community violence, or other circumstances. Behavior changes as a result of these early traumatic experiences (such as withdrawal or challenging behaviors) may be evident.

Kinship families also bring tremendous strengths. “Children who are raised in kinship families have more stability in their living arrangements compared to those in traditional foster care placements. They are also less likely to report mental health issues compared to children in traditional foster care arrangements, and less likely to experience substantiated cases of abuse and neglect when they are being raised by a relative. Relative caregivers report that their role gives them a sense of purpose in life, keeps them active, and helps them to learn new things. Some talk about kinship parenting as an opportunity for a ‘do over’ to improve their own parenting a second time around.”¹¹

⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office (2020). Child welfare and aging programs: HHS could enhance support for grandparents and other relative caregivers. Retrieved from <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-20-434>⁷ Ibid

⁹ Generations United. (2009). GrandFacts: Data, interpretation, and implications for caregivers. Retrieved from <http://www.brookdalefoundation.net/RAPP/RAPPpublications/GrandFacts%20Data%20Interpretation%20and%20Implications%20for%20Caregivers.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Personal email from Jennifer Crittenden, PhD, MSW, October 24, 2020.

RESOURCES FOR AND ABOUT CUSTODIAL GRANDPARENTS

Grandfamilies Certificate Course

Offered by the University of Maine Center on Aging for service providers and agencies working with extended family caregivers. Nine weekly online modules, 2 hours per week, over the course of 3 months. Information on enrollment here: www.kinshipcert.org.

[Grandfamilies.org/State-Fact-Sheets](http://www.grandfamilies.org/State-Fact-Sheets)

A collaboration among Generations United, The American Bar Association, and the Casey Family Foundation, [grandfamilies.org](http://www.grandfamilies.org) offers a range of resources for those supporting grandfamilies. State-specific fact sheets provide info on trusted local programs and resources, public benefits, educational assistance, legal relationship options, and state laws.

Grandfamilies: Strengths and Challenges

Overview and national data from Generations United.

<https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2020/05/Grandfamilies-GeneralFactSheet.pdf>

Grand Resources: A Grandparent's and Other Relative's Guide to Raising Children with Disabilities

Provides education and special education resources <https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/Grand%20Resources.pdf>

Kinship Navigators

Created to link families with resources and support in their state or jurisdiction, these vary widely from state to state. See examples for New York (<http://www.nysnavigator.org/>) and Florida (<https://www.childrenshomenetwork.org/kinship/>). To find a state not mentioned here, try searching "kinship navigator" and the name of your state online.

Parenting the Second Time Around (PASTA)

Developed through the Cornell University Cooperative Extension. For people who wish to lead workshops for grandparents or other relatives in a parenting role. Includes outlines, handouts, and supplementary materials for eight workshops. Available at www.cornellstore.com.

Why More Grandparents Are Raising Children

Short overview from PEW, 2016. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2016/11/02/why-more-grandparents-are-raising-children>

FINAL THOUGHTS

Grand Connections facilitators can help grandparents reimagine their roles, creating a place where they can share their joys and challenges, explore the latest research on child development, and practice collaboration across generations. The guidance you provide honors the authentic experience of all participants in the Grand Connections group and brings this curriculum to life. We thank you for providing the safe space, knowledge, and compassion that makes this possible.

LEGAL INFORMATION & PERMISSIONS

These materials are intended for education and training to help promote a high standard of care by professionals. Use of these materials is voluntary, and their use does not confer any professional credentials or qualification to take any registration, certification, or board or licensure examination and neither confers nor infers competency to perform any related professional functions.

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Grand Connections

ZERO TO THREE

1255 23rd St., NW, Ste. 350

Washington, DC 20037

Web: www.zerotothree.org

Are you a grandparent providing child care for a grandchild under five?



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Early connections last a lifetime



Sign up for our free online workshop series!

Want to learn more about how to make the most of your time with your grandchild?

Connect with other grandparents?

Catch up on the latest info on raising little ones?

Join _____'s grandparenting group and celebrate the power of this special relationship.

What: 7-session grandparenting program

Who can enroll: Grandparents who share in the care of a grandchild, ages birth to five

When: _____

Where: _____

Cost: It's free. _____

What you'll do:

- Connect with other grandparents caring for a young grandchild.
- Find new ways to help your grandchild learn through playtime.
- Discover how to calm your little one when they are overwhelmed (and learn other strategies for managing challenging behavior).
- Share *your* tips on child development: mealtimes, sleep, screen time, and more.



We hope you'll join us. For more info, please contact: _____

ZERO TO THREE's mission is to ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life. Visit: www.zerotothree.org

¿Es usted un abuelo o abuela que cuida a un nieto o nieta menor de 5 años?



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Inscríbese y asista a nuestra serie de talleres gratuitos en línea!

¿Quiere saber más sobre la mejor manera de aprovechar el tiempo que pasa con su nieto?

¿Conectarse con otros abuelos?

¿Estar al día sobre la información más reciente sobre la crianza de los niños pequeños?

Inscríbese en el taller _____
y únase a este grupo de abuelos para celebrar el poder de esta relación tan especial.

Qué: Programa de 7 sesiones sobre la crianza por los abuelos.

Quiénes pueden inscribirse: Abuelos y abuelas que comparten el cuidado de un nieto o nieta, menor de 5 años.

Cuándo: _____

Dónde: _____

Costo: Es gratis. _____

Qué hará usted:

- Se conectará con otros abuelos que cuidan a un nieto pequeño.
- Encontrará nuevas maneras de ayudar para que su nieto aprenda mientras juega.
- Descubrirá cómo calmar a su nieto cuando esté abrumado (y aprenderá otras estrategias para manejar los comportamientos desafiantes).
- Compartirá *sus propios* consejos sobre el desarrollo del niño, como las horas de la comida, dormir, tiempo frente a una pantalla y mucho más.



Esperamos verlo en los talleres. Para más información, sírvase comunicarse con:

La misión de CERO A TRES es asegurar que todos los bebés y preescolares inicien su vida de la mejor manera posible. Visite: www.zerotothree.org

Are you a grandparent raising a grandchild under five?



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



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What: 7-session grandparenting program.

Who can enroll: Grandparents raising a grandchild, birth to five years of age.

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