

Support Group Discussion Guide: **Unexpectedly Parenting Again**



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We thank them for their generosity!*

Table of Contents

Purpose.....	3
Ice Breaker.....	4
Introduction to Topic.....	5
Objectives.....	6
No Matter What Video.....	7
Video Discussion Prompts.....	8
Strategies.....	9
Activity.....	10
Resources.....	11

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to normalize the myriad of feelings we, as relative caregivers, experience around parenting again unexpectedly – including resentment, guilt, and even shame.

“How do I explain that I have my grandkids because my son is addicted to meth?”

“I love my grandchildren with all my heart, but this wasn’t what I’d planned for my life.”



On average, relative caregivers have 48-72 hours to make the decision to take in children, a decision that will change the whole course of their lives. They are often expected to agree without hesitation. It can feel like the “love is enough” expectation puts unrealistic pressure on caregivers to downplay feelings or challenges they may be experiencing.

The hope is that this discussion guide will provide prompting for safe and non-judgmental exploration of issues we’re facing and help give voice to the very real, normal, and understandable feelings we all struggle with. You are encouraged to share strategies you have used to work through the more difficult moments and find the support you need.

Ice Breaker



Favorite Childhood Memories (10-15 minutes)

Ask participants to share one of their favorite childhood memories. This is intended to get them to reflect on the kinds of experiences that create happy memories for kids. Sharing stories should spark good memories and set a positive tone going into the discussion.

Hopefully, this icebreaker will also get participants to reflect on how to create those kinds of happy memories for the children in their care.

Helpful Hint:

Generally, stories of best childhood memories are grounded in themes of time spent with family, friends, and loved ones. The facilitator can refer back to this theme of “we’re happiest in connection with others” throughout the session. This can support the idea that, although relative caregiving can feel isolating and overwhelming at times, we are surrounded by help and support. There is no shame in expressing how we are feeling and reaching out for help.

*For a group larger than eight, breaking into smaller groups is recommended.

Introduction to Topic

Unexpectedly parenting again? You're not alone.



At any given time in Wisconsin, a reported 79,000 children are living in a home where the head of household is a relative other than the parent. For perspective, that's enough people to fill Lambeau Field. Over 22,500 Wisconsin grandparents are reported to be caring for grandchildren. For every child being raised by a relative in foster care, there are at least another nine children living with kin outside of foster care.

Although you're in good company, it can certainly feel isolating.

In this session, we're going to explore the realities, both joyful and challenging, of parenting again unexpectedly.

In the video included in this session, a grandmother shares how the decision to take in four of her grandchildren, two permanently, changed all the plans she and her husband had for retirement. She emphasizes, "The rewards and love you get from the children outweigh any of the difficulties you have."

Although the sentiment is admirable, it doesn't negate the fact that caregiving comes with considerable grief, loss, and sacrifice.

Objectives

This session will help us better understand:

- We are not alone.
- Conflicting feelings such as resentment, fear, guilt, or anger are normal and have no reflection on our love for, or commitment to, the children we are caring for.
- Taking time for self-care is the best thing we can do for ourselves AND the child(ren) in our care.
- Support is crucial. Peer groups can help provide much-needed connection and support. Being part of this support group is already a huge step in the right direction.
- Help is available.

No Matter What Video: **How Parenting Again Changed Our Lives**

When Pam and her husband were asked to care for her grandchildren, they didn't hesitate to say yes.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wel-gO0aZo4>

Click link to play video

How Parenting Again Changed Our Lives

Discussion Prompts

Reactions

1. Are there any thoughts, feelings, or reactions this video clip brought up for you?
2. How has your experience been similar or different?
3. Have you had conflicting feelings about parenting again?
4. Have you had opportunities to express these feelings in a safe, supportive space?

Challenges

1. Did you have time to prepare to parent again?
2. What are some of the challenges you face as a relative/kinship caregiver?
3. What kind of support do you have?
4. What are your coping strategies?
5. What kinds of assistance would be helpful to you? Childcare? Transportation? Respite? Meal preparation?

Strategies & Success Stories

1. What strategies and tips can you share that have helped you better manage the challenges you've encountered?
2. What resources are you aware of or have utilized?
3. Do you have a story to share about the progress you've made that you're particularly proud of?

Strategies for Managing Parenting Again

Below are a variety of suggested tools to help manage the stressors and uncertainty of parenting again unexpectedly.

Find Supports

- Support groups
- Another relative caregiver
- A friend or relative who understands

Take Advantage of Learning Opportunities

- Workshops, webinars, and classes on related topics such as trauma-informed care, substance abuse, co-parenting, or child development can be a tremendous help in understanding and caring for relative children.

Ask for Help/Connect to Resources

- Determine what sorts of assistance would be helpful.
- Look into community resources. Many churches and other community organizations offer resources to support caregiver families.
- When people offer help, take it. They wouldn't be asking if they didn't want to help.

Self-Care/Stress Reduction

- Eat healthily
- Get plenty of sleep
- Get daily exercise
- Take time for yourself
- Connect with supports
- Focus on the positive

Activity: Staying Connected

Although it may feel like starting a whole new life now that you're caring for relative children, it doesn't mean you need to lose touch with who you are.

Activity:

Create a simple plan for staying connected to your "pre-parenting again" life, friends, and support.

1. Make a list of:
 - a. The top three people with whom it is important to you to stay connected
 - b. The top three things you enjoy doing that makes you happy
2. Commit to
 - a. Connecting with at least one person per week either in-person or by phone
 - b. Making time each day to do something for yourself (even just 10-20 minutes can make a big difference)
 - c. Seeking out a support group or other activities that will connect you with other relative caregivers
 - d. Making sure you have someone to talk to on the rough days
 - e. Allowing yourself grace when you're feeling angry, sad, or resentful (it is normal and it will pass)

Resources

Additional Coalition Resources

- [Resources for Relative Caregivers](https://wifostercareandadoption.org/resources/for-relative-caregivers-2/)
(<https://wifostercareandadoption.org/resources/for-relative-caregivers-2/>)
- [Wisconsin Kinship Navigator Guide](https://wifostercareandadoption.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/kinshipnavigatorguide7finalweb.pdf)
(<https://wifostercareandadoption.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/kinshipnavigatorguide7finalweb.pdf>)

Additional Resources

- [Coping with the Unique Challenges of Kinship Care: Loss and Ambivalence](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dncR5NUv3so)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dncR5NUv3so>)
- [Taking Care of YOU: Self-Care for Family Caregivers](https://www.caregiver.org/resource/taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers/)
(<https://www.caregiver.org/resource/taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers/>)
- [5 Ways to Reduce and Manage Caregiver Resentment](https://dailycaring.com/5-ways-to-reduce-and-manage-caregiver-resentment/)
(<https://dailycaring.com/5-ways-to-reduce-and-manage-caregiver-resentment/>)
- [Caregiver Stress and Burnout](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/caregiver-stress-and-burnout.htm)
(<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/caregiver-stress-and-burnout.htm>)
- [3 Ways to Manage Caregiver Resentment](https://www.crossroadshospice.com/hospice-palliative-care-blog/2017/february/15/3-ways-to-manage-caregiver-resentment/)
(<https://www.crossroadshospice.com/hospice-palliative-care-blog/2017/february/15/3-ways-to-manage-caregiver-resentment/>)
- [Anger Management Exercises to Help You Stay Calm](https://www.healthline.com/health/anger-management-exercises)
(<https://www.healthline.com/health/anger-management-exercises>)
- [Wisconsin Kinship Navigator](https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/kinship/navigator) (<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/kinship/navigator>)
- [Grandfamilies.org](https://www.grandfamilies.org/) (<https://www.grandfamilies.org/>)
- [Kinship Care and the Child Welfare System](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinshi/)
(<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinshi/>)
- [Wisconsin GrandFacts State Fact Sheet 2021 Update](https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Wisconsin%20GrandFacts%20State%20Fact%20Sheet%202021%20Update.pdf)
(<https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Wisconsin%20GrandFacts%20State%20Fact%20Sheet%202021%20Update.pdf>)