

RESOURCE GUIDE

for

Grandparents and other Older Adults

Raising Children



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Helping senior adults in Southern Illinois remain independent since 1978.

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Raising children is a difficult, emotional job even in the best of situations. Remember to take a moment now and then to commend yourself for what you are doing – making a difference in your grandchild's life by giving him or her the chance to be safe, loved, and nurtured.

This guide lists important information about programs and resources you can use as a grandparent or other relative raising children.

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FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Child Support Payments

Even though you may be taking care of the children in your home, the birth parents may be held financially responsible. Certain programs such as the TANF program described below, require cooperation in attempting to collect child support from the birth parents. Also, determining paternity (the children's father) may be required. Under Illinois law, both birth parents have financial responsibilities for the children whether or not they're married. No matter how young they may be, the birth parents may be required to make child support payments.

To get help collecting child support, establishing paternity or information on other child support enforcement services, call the DHS Bureau of Collections at 1-800-457-6273 or the Child Support Help Line at 1-800-447-4278 (outside of Illinois, call 1-217-785-1692).

Child Care Centers

For referrals to child care centers and other child care options call the Child Care Resource & Referral Center at 1-800-232-0908.

Child Care Subsidies

There are subsidies for low income families to help pay for child care for children under age 13 (or age 20 and under if they have disabilities). The responsible party raising the children must be working or they must be receiving TANF (see description below) and participating in an approved activity. There is a co-payment based on family size, income, and the number of children in child care. For more information, contact the Department of Human Services in your county or their 24-hour hotline at 1-800-843-6154 or the Child Care Resource & Referral Center Subsidy Services at 1-800-232-0908. To check on subsidy payment call 1-800-804-3833.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or TANF

TANF provides financial assistance in the form of a monthly check to help families care for children. This program also provides help to children who have been deprived of parental support or care. Children who are eligible for TANF are also eligible for Medicaid health care assistance. Most children under the care of their grandparents or other relative are eligible to receive child-only grants under the TANF program. This means that your income and assets are not counted in the child's eligibility.

You should be aware that certain factors must be established for eligibility of a TANF child-only grant. For instance, you must:

- prove you are related to the child through birth certificate and or other legal documents,
- prove that the child is living with you,
- prove the child's citizenship,
- provide the Social Security numbers for each child applying for assistance,
- provide proof of health insurance, if you have it,
- provide information about the birth parents and cooperate in attempting to obtain child support from them, and
- provide proof of any income and/or assets belonging to the children.

For more information on TANF, contact the Department of Human Services in your county or their 24-hour hotline at 1-800-323-4769.

Energy Assistance or LIHEAP

LIHEAP helps pay for heating bills (occasionally there also is money for cooling bills). The first two months of the heating program (September 1st through October 30th) are set aside for eligible people aged 60 or older and the disabled. You will need:

- proof of household gross income for last 30 days,
- current energy bills,
- Social Security number for everyone in household,
- TANF medical card for anyone receiving benefits, and
- either proof of home ownership and insurance or rental agreement or receipt which shows the amount of rent.

The benefit amount is based on the eligible household's income, amount of utility bills, and type of heating source. LIHEAP is operated throughout the state by a network of local agencies that determine eligibility and provide benefits to households. To apply contact the local agency which administers LIHEAP in the county where you live or call the LIHEAP information line at 1-800-252-8643.

Supplemental Security Income or SSI

SSI provides monthly payments to low-income elderly, blind or disabled individuals, including children. If a child has a disability, he or she may qualify for assistance. A disabled child is a person under age 18 with a physical or mental impairment that causes marked and severe functional limitations and has lasted or is expected to last for twelve continuous months or result in death.

Parents or guardians can apply for blind or disabled children under age 18. You will need to provide the following information when applying:

- the children's Social Security cards or numbers,
- the children's birth certificates or other proof of age,
- the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of doctors, hospitals, and clinics that have seen the children, and
- the children's proof of U.S. citizenship status.

For more information or to apply for SSI, contact your local Social Security office or call their toll-free number at 1-800-772-1213.

Earned Income Tax Credit or EITC

EITC is a special benefit for moderate and low-income working people who are raising children. EITC provides working people who qualify for assistance by either:

- if you owe taxes – reducing the amount you owe or giving you money back; or
- if you owe no taxes – giving you a monetary grant.

There are also Advance Earned Income Tax Credit payments available that allow those who qualify to get part of EITC in advance instead of waiting until after the end of the year.

EITC is administered by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). You file for EITC when you file your tax return or by obtaining the appropriate application forms available at most U.S. Post Offices or by contacting the Internal Revenue Service at 1-800-829-1040.

You may also contact the AARP Grandparent Information Center at 1-202-434-2296 to request a copy of the *EITC Tax Package for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*.

Gap-Filling Services

Sometimes the needs of the grandchildren don't always fit the definitions for assistance through standard government programs. Many times these needs can only be met through gap-filling services offered by various agencies. Contact the local office of DCFS listed on page 6 or one of the agencies listed on pages 14 & 15 for more information and the availability of these funds.

Bright Star College Scholarships

College scholarships, ranging from \$500 to \$5,000, awarded on the basis of need and an essay by the applicant. More information is at www.brightstarsavings.com.

FOOD PROGRAMS

Hunger Hotline

Receive free and friendly information on federal nutrition programs, including pre-screening for the Food Stamps program (Illinois LINK), information and eligibility guidelines for other nutrition programs, referrals to emergency food pantries and soup kitchens, and information about many of the food programs listed below. Call the hotline at 1-800-359-2163.

WIC

The WIC program provides food vouchers, nutrition education & counseling, health screening, support, and referrals for mothers, babies and children up to age 5 who qualify. Grandparents or other relatives who are caregivers (have medical and financial responsibility even if not the legal guardian) can apply for WIC for the children living with them. Eligibility is based on income, child's age and medical or health risk.

On your first visit to a WIC clinic, please bring the following with you:

- your identification (driver's license, photo ID, etc.),
- proof of residency (your utility bill or recent mail),
- proof of birth (birth certificate or other identification for the children), and
- proof of immunization.

For information on WIC services and the nearest agency, contact the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services at 1-800-323-4769.

School and Summer Food Programs

This program provides meals for free or a reduced price to children in public or nonprofit private schools or in residential child care facilities. Schools and agencies can charge up to 40 cents for a reduced price lunch. During the Summer, children who receive free or reduced price meals in school can receive them at other locations through the summer food program. Call the children's school for more information.

Food Stamps or the Illinois LINK Card

Food stamps are issued monthly through the Illinois LINK card to qualified families based on household size and income. You will need to provide proof of your household income when you apply for food stamps. For information, contact your county office of the Department of Human Services office or 1-800-252-8635

Food Pantries, Soup Kitchens & Used Clothing Stores

For information on food pantries, soup kitchens, or used clothing stores in southern Illinois, call 1-888-895-3306. For information in other areas of Illinois, call 1-800-252-8635, 1-217-524-5799, or 1-800-359-2163.

Commodity Food Distribution or TEFAP

TEFAP distributes surplus food commodities every other month throughout the state. Every county has at least one site. The times and locations for food distribution is announced in the newspapers and radio. Food items include a variety of the following depending on the time of year and products available – non-fat dry milk, butter, cornmeal, flour, peanut butter, canned meats, canned fruits & vegetables. Call the Hunger Hotline 1-800-359-2163 for a location.

Angel Food Ministries

Angel Food Ministries is a non-profit, non-denominational organization dedicated to providing food relief to consumers. One unit consists of both fresh and frozen foods. Each unit costs \$30 and can feed a family of four for about one week (or a single person for nearly one month). The food is the same as can be purchased at grocery stores. There are no applications or eligibility requirements. Illinois Link's offline voucher system is accepted. Use www.angelfoodministries.com to find a location near you. Currently, there are several location in southern Illinois.

CUSTODY, GUARDIANSHIP, ADOPTION, & FOSTER CARE

Physical custody is an informal arrangement in which grandparents are caring for grandchildren in their home without official or legal authority by the court. Grandparents often end up making decisions for the children under this arrangement even though the birth parents retain the legal rights and responsibilities of their children.

Legal custody is a formal arrangement in which decision-making of the grandchildren is granted by the court to a grandparent and the rights of the birth parents have been suspended.

Guardianship is a legal arrangement in which a grandparent has the court-ordered authority and responsibility to care for grandchildren. The rights of the birth parents are not severed, although guardians can stop the birth parents from taking the children out of their home without getting consent from the court. If allowed by the court, the birth parents may have the right to visitation. Birth parents, if able, must contribute money to support the children. Custody/guardianship can only be transferred back to the birth parents by the court.

Adoption is a formal legal agreement granted by the court which ends the legal relationship between a child and his or her birth parents. Adoption permanently transfers all parental rights from the birth parents to the adoptive parents. Unlike legal custody and guardianship, adoption is permanent and cannot be modified if the birth parents becomes able to care for the child.

Department of Children & Family Services or DCFS Addresses & Local Phone Numbers

Anna – 108 Denny Industrial Dr., 833-4449. Cairo – 1315 Washington, 734-0858.
Harrisburg – 324 E. Raymond, 253-7604. Marion – 107 Airway Dr., 993-8639.
Metropolis – 200 W. 5th St., 524-2428. Murphysboro – 1210 Hanson, 687-1733.

Extended Family Support Program

DCFS and its community partners provide assistance to adults who are already caring for their relatives' children. The children may not be abused or neglected but social services may still be needed to stabilize the relative caregivers' household or prevent a later placement away from the relatives. An array of services - provided through collaborative efforts between DCFS, probate court, the Department of Public Aid, the State Central Register, and public schools - focus on short-term interventions to help relatives continue to provide quality care. Call DCFS at 1-800-252-2873.

Foster Care

Foster care is the temporary placement by DCFS in homes outside the birth parents' home due to abuse, neglect or dependency. Placing a child in foster care is not intended as a permanent living arrangement but to protect the child with the ultimate goal of returning the child home. When it is not possible to return a child home safely, DCFS seeks adoption. However, if adoption is not a viable option then foster care can be explored. The difference between adoption and foster care is that adoption requires the complete termination of the birth parents' rights to raise the children. Foster care generally allows birth parents to maintain reasonable visitation rights with the child and consent before adoption can be finalized.

More information about foster care is available at any local DCFS office. The DCFS Foster Care Handbook is available online at www.state.il.us/dcfs. The Foster Parent Hotline is 1-800-624-5437.

Becoming a Foster Parent or Adoptive Parent

If you want to become a foster or adoptive parent, call DCFS at 1-800-624-5437. This call will result in a DCFS or private child welfare agency contacting you about foster care or adoption. The agency makes an appointment to come to your home and helps you decide if foster care or adoption is a good plan for you. The representative will also give you an application and a medical form to complete for each family member.

The law requires that a criminal background check be run on all applicants, therefore you will be fingerprinted. In addition, personal references provided by you will be contacted. While these checks are being conducted, you will attend training classes to help prepare you for your future role as a foster or adoptive parent. The licensing and training process takes from two to six months.

Subsidized Foster Care

Grandparents may be eligible for DCFS subsidized foster care when DCFS determines that the safe return of the children to the birth parents' home and adoption are not acceptable alternatives. Each child in the DCFS subsidized foster care program is eligible for a subsidy. Call DCFS at 1-800-624-5437 to find out if you qualify for a subsidy.

HEALTH CARE & INSURANCE – DRUGS & ALCOHOL ABUSE

All Kids, Family Care, Healthy Kids (health insurance & checkups)

All Kids is a complete health care program for every child in Illinois, age 18 and under, regardless of medical condition or income of the family. All Kids covers all the health care a child may need, including doctor and hospital visits, dental and eye care, prescription drugs, medical equipment, mental health services, and much more. The amount of the monthly premium and co-pay is based on household income and size of the family. For information and an application, call 1-866-255-5437.

Healthy Kids program helps kids get regular checkups needed for Head Start, school, camp, day care, sports programs, WIC, and for staying healthy. Healthy Kids helps parents find physicians who give checkups to kids. Babies, kids, and teens through age 20 can get Healthy Kids checkups with their All Kids card. Call 1-866-468-7543 for a medical checkup or 1-888-286-2447 for a dental checkup.

Family Care provides health insurance assistance to some parents who have children age 18 and under. Families receiving Family Care pay a small co-payment and no premiums. If the program expands to serve families with higher incomes (Illinois has permission to expand the program but hasn't yet), it will likely require those families to pay higher co-payments and premiums. For information, call 1-866-255-5437.

Dental Care

Children approved for Kid Care can receive most dental services from authorized dentists located throughout the state by calling 1-888-286-2447 for a dental referral. For more information on dental services for children, call the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services at 1-800-323-4769.

The Southern Illinois University - Heartland Clinic provides preventive dental services for children, ages 3 and up. Any resident of Southern Illinois who is currently a Medicaid recipient, or low-income resident, can make an appointment. Patients must notify the Clinic if they're unable to make their appointment or they will not be rescheduled. Appointments are taken for Wednesday & Thursdays from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. There are no fees to the patient. Contact the Clinic's Receptionist at (618) 453-2353.

Health Care Clinics

Health care clinics assist individuals and families when medical care is difficult for them to obtain. The costs are usually based on the family's ability to pay. They accept Medicare, Medicaid, and insurance, also.

Rural Health Care Clinics

Rural Health, Inc.
513 N. Main St.
Anna: (618) 833-4471

Community Health Services
RR #1 Box 11 (St Rt 3 @ Interstate 57)
Cairo: Health Clinic:(618) 734-4400
Social Services: (618) 734-4534

Adolescent Health Center
101 S. Wall St.
Carbondale: (618) 529-2621

Cartersville Family Practice Center
1006 S. Division St.
Cartersville: (618) 985-4841

Christopher Rural Health
4241 State Highway 14
Christopher: (618) 724-7536

Rural Health, Inc.
Route 51 North
Dongola: (618) 827-3545

Pope County Clinic
217 S. Adams
Golconda: (618) 683-3781

Grand Tower Community Health Center
624 Front St.
Grand Tower: (618) 565-2232

Murphysboro Health Center
7 Hospital Dr.
Murphysboro: (618) 687-3418
Emergency: (618) 684-2321
Dental: (618) 684-2321

Hardin County Clinic
Highway 146
Rosiclare: (618) 285-6191

Tamms Health Center
2nd and Russell St.
Tamms: (618) 747-2391

Rural Health, Inc.
803 N. First St.
Vienna: (618) 658-2811

Family Health Clinics

Abundant Health Resource Clinic
441 E. Willow St.
Carbondale: (618) 529-9459

The Bridge Clinic
715 E. Church
Harrisburg: (618) 294-8330

Hands of Hope Family Clinic
808 W. Prairie St.
Marion: (618) 998-8282

Immunizations

Local health departments usually provide free or low-cost immunizations for children, as well as other health services, including tests for Tuberculosis and lead ingestion from lead-based paints. For information on programs in your area that offer free or low-cost immunizations, call the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services at 1-800-323-4769 or your local health department.

Drug & Alcohol Abuse

Research shows that many children with drug or alcohol-dependent parents can benefit tremendously when helped and encouraged by other adults. In fact, children who cope most effectively with the trauma of growing up in families affected by alcoholism or drug addiction often attribute their sense of well-being to the support of a non-alcoholic parent, step-parent, grandparent, teacher or other significant adult in their lives.

Grandparents, health professionals, school teachers and guidance counselors, community-based program personnel, social workers, athletic coaches and religious leaders are just some of the adults who regularly come in contact with children. As trusted and respected figures in their lives, they are in a unique position to support children who live in alcohol or drug-dependent families.

Most adults can support children in three ways.

- First, you can provide children with age-appropriate information about alcohol, drugs and the disease of addiction.
- Second, you can teach children how to identify and express their feelings in healthy ways, especially by seeking out and speaking with "safe" adults.
- Third, and perhaps most important, you can take the time to develop a healthy adult/child relationship.

For more help, call you local community counseling center:

Alexander County at 734-2665, Franklin County at 937-6483, Gallatin County at 272-4691, Hardin County at 287-7010, Jackson County at 457-6703, Johnson County at 658-2611, Massac County at 524-9368, Perry County at 542-4357 or 357-9339, Pope County at 683-2461, Pulaski County at 734-2665, Saline County at 273-3326, Union County at 833-8551, or Williamson County at 997-5336.

Additional information can be obtained from:

The National Association for Children of Alcoholics 1-888-554-2627.

Al-Anon/Alateen For Families and Friends of Alcoholics 1-888-425-2666.

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment National Helpline 1-800-662-HELP.

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information 1-800-729-6686.

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. 1-800-622-2255.

Office of National Drug Control Policy 1-800-666-3332.

HOUSING

Housing Crisis Hotlines

The homelessness 24-hour hotline is 1-800-654-8595. The housing crisis hotline is 1-847-866-7027.

Housing Choice Voucher Program or Section 8 Housing

Although not all counties may have them, the Housing Choice Voucher Program, or Section 8 housing, helps low-income families – including the elderly and the disabled – to afford decent, safe and sanitary housing in the private housing market. The local Housing Authority issues a voucher to the family which may be used anywhere under most circumstances. Families find their own housing in the community from a landlord who agrees to accept the housing voucher and is approved by the local Housing Authority. The rent is usually 30% of the family's income each month, although it may be more than 30%.

To be considered for Section 8 housing, apply at the local Housing Authority office and bring the following information:

- verification of all income from whatever source in writing.
- birth certificates and Social Security numbers for all individuals planning to live in the unit.
- if married or divorced, a copy of your marriage license or Judgment of Dissolution.
- names and complete addresses of three personal references other than family members.
- names and complete addresses of current and/or previous landlords.
- if a family member is pregnant, a statement from the physician.
- verification of any preferences to which you believe you are entitled.

There is a criminal check made of all adult household members. If the family qualifies, they will then be placed on a waiting list for a voucher. When the family nears the top of the waiting list, all information will once again be verified to determine whether or not the family is still eligible to participate in the program. For more information and to apply, contact your local or county Housing Authority office.

OTHER HELP

Head Start

Head Start is a national program that helps low-income children under age five become better prepared for school. Head Start works with community organizations, especially early learning programs, which receive money to provide comprehensive services to children and their families.

Other Head Start services include health screening, immunizations, and other medical, dental, and vision services. Head Start is structured to get the parents or other responsible party involved in the children's education early on and allows them to participate in parenting and adult education classes.

For the location of the Head Start program in your area, contact your local school system or the Illinois Head Start Association at 1-217-586-7600.

Legal Help

Grandparents and other older relatives raising children often have questions or need legal advice about custody, guardianship, school enrollment, medical issues, and public benefits. You may receive free legal advice if you qualify. Representation in court may also be provided depending on the situation.

For more information, contact the Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Services at (618) 457-7800 or toll-free at 1-800-642-5335, the SIUC Legal Services to the Elderly at 1-800-673-6130, or the Illinois Lawyer Referral at 1-800-252-8916.

Also, there is general legal information available on the Internet at www.illinoislawhelp.org and www.law.siu.edu/selfhelp/index.htm

Child Abuse Hotline

Call DCFS at 1-800-25-ABUSE (or 1-800-252-2873 a 24-hour service).

Runaway Hotlines

Call Runaway DCFS Youth Hotline at 1-866-503-0184 or missing children through ISEARCH at 1-800-843-5763. The Crisis lines for youth in need, runaway message service, confidential and nonjudgmental referral services, free ticket home program are 1-800-621-4000 or 1-800-999-9999 (24-hour services).

Poison Control Center Hotline

Answers to questions and referral to hospital services, if needed, call 1-800-543-2022.

Child Safety Issues

Keeping your grandchildren safe may seem like a full-time job, and at times it will be. However, by establishing good safety practices for you and your grandchildren, you are not only setting a good example, but will also help protect your grandchildren from potential dangers and accidents.

Consider the following safety tips.

Car safety:

- Use proper safety belt restraints at all times in a moving vehicle.
- Make sure infants are in an “approved” child safety seat in cars.
- Never leave young children alone in cars.
- Children under 12 years old should never ride in the front seat.

Home safety:

- Keep small objects away from small children – needles, pins, coins, beads, etc. can be deadly if swallowed.
- Make sure that cribs have a snug fitting mattress and narrowly spaced slats.
- Keep all cords, strings, blinds, and curtain cords, out and away from cribs.
- Never let children play with plastic bags.
- Never allow children to fall asleep with bottles in mouths.
- Help prevent poisoning by keeping all cleaning supplies, chemicals, medicines and cosmetics out of reach or in child-proof cabinets.
- Install smoke detectors and check batteries twice a year.
- Hold a mock fire drill with your grandchildren - plan escape routes and arrange for a safe meeting place outside in case of fire.
- Never leave small children alone in or near water - including bathtubs and pools.

Personal safety: Teach your grandchildren the following personal safety musts:•

- To memorize their full name, address and phone number, including area code, state, and zip code.
- How to use the telephone, how to make calls to the operator and how to dial emergency numbers.
- That a stranger is someone they and you do not know well. Never enter a stranger's car or home.
- To keep the doors locked and only admit authorized people to their home.
- How to use a code word. A code word is a special word that only you and your grandchildren know. It is used if you need to have another person pick up your grandchildren so that they can verify that the person is safe.
- They are safer playing and walking with friends.

- To avoid alleys, as well as poorly lit and lonely or deserted areas.
- Never to wander away from you or from your yard unless they tell you and receive permission.
- To tell you if something strange or uncomfortable has happened to them.
- Never to give information about themselves, including home phone number, to anyone except authorized people.

For more information on child safety issues, call your local fire and police departments. Other places to obtain information on child safety issues include schools, hospitals, and the American Red Cross.

Tips on Dealing with Agencies

Be patient. You may encounter long waits on the phone or in person. Many agencies do not have enough staff to take your calls immediately. Also, agencies may have automated answering systems or answering machines.

Call during times when the agencies' phones aren't as busy. This differs by agency, however, it is often easier to get through to an agency during the early morning hours on Tuesday through Thursday. The busiest phone times usually are during the lunch hours, 11:00-1:00, and on Mondays and Fridays.

Keep a log of the name, title, and phone and extension number of the person to whom you speak. Record important details of your conversation for future reference.

Make sure you are aware of your appeal rights. Just because you are turned down for a program or service does not mean that the decision is correct. For assistance in learning about your appeal rights, refer to one of the resources mentioned under "Legal Help" on page 12. The DHS Appeals line is 1-800-435-0774.

Obtaining Information about Children's Services

Parent Resource Center
Adolescent Health Center
101 S. Wall St.
Carbondale, IL
(618) 529-2621

Lutheran Social Services
1616 W. Main St.
Marion, IL
(618) 997-9196

Catholic Social Services
214 S. University Ave.
Carbondale, IL
(618) 351-0743

Information about Services for Seniors and Older Adults Raising Children

In Southern Illinois, call one of these –

Egyptian Area Agency on Aging
200 E Plaza Dr
Carterville, IL 62918
(618) 985-8311 or 1-888-895-3306

Franklin County Senior Services
225 E. Poplar St.
West Frankfort, IL
Area: Franklin County.
(618) 937-3511

Gold Plate Program of Perry County
721 N. Hickory St.
Du Quoin, IL
Area: Perry County.
(618) 542-3511

Golden Circle Senior Citizens Council
RR #1, Box 191A
Elizabethtown, IL
Area: Gallatin, Hardin, Pope, and Saline
counties.
(618) 287-5590

Senior Adult Services
409 N. Springer St.
Carbondale, IL
Area: Jackson County.
(618) 457-4151

Shawnee Alliance for Seniors
6355 Brandhorst Dr.
Carterville, IL
Area: southern 13 counties.
1-800-642-7773

Southern Pride Senior Program
Route 146 & Rt. 37
Vienna, IL
Area: Alexander, Johnson, Massac, and
Pulaski counties.
(618) 658-9669

Williamson County Programs on Aging
1201 Weaver Road
Herrin, IL
Area: Williamson County.
(618) 988-1585

For other locations in Illinois, call –
Illinois Senior HelpLine
1-800-252-8966.

For locations outside of Illinois, call –
Eldercare Locator
1-800-677-1116

Additional Resources

Parent Help Line: 1-888-727-5889.

If you have access to the Internet, visit our web site for more in-depth information about grandparents and other older family members raising children. Our web address is www.EgyptianAAA.org and look for our Guide for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren under the caregiving section, or call our office at 1-888-895-3306.

Call your local senior center:

Alexander County at 734-1050, Franklin County at 438-8691 or 937-3511, Gallatin County at 272-7570, Hardin County at 287-2501, Jackson County at 457-4151, Johnson County at 658-8140, Massac County at 524-9755, Perry County at 542-3511, Pope County at 683-7741, Pulaski County at 745-6149, Saline County at 252-7940, Union County at 833-4197, Williamson County at 988-1585.

The Internet site www.AccessSI.org lists agencies and organizations in the southernmost 17 counties of Illinois.

Also, call the Southern Illinois Healthcare - Senior Advantage Program at 1-877-480-4040 or the Heartland Regional Medical Center - Senior Circle at (618) 998-7000.

TAKING CARE OF YOU

Raising grandchildren and dealing with other family matters can be very stressful. Follow these stress reducing suggestions:

- Keep up your own health and walk or exercise regularly.
- Take time for yourself. Insist on a regular quiet hour and do something you enjoy.
- Talk out your problems with friends, other grandparents, family counselor, or join a support group. This is an excellent place to get information, ideas, and emotional support.
- Consider your religious community and personal faith for strength and assistance.
- Concentrate on the task at hand. Don't dwell on the past. Looking too far ahead can also be overwhelming. If you can't take it a day at a time, try to accomplish one thing at a time.
- Learn to say no. Set limits with grandchildren and stick to them.
- Practice patience. Let those you care for do as much for themselves as possible.
- Focus on the positive and keep your sense of humor.
- Let yourself off the hook. The circumstances of the birth parents are not your fault.
- Accept reality. See things as they are and not how you wish them to be.
- Eliminate hurtful thoughts and self-pity which only drag you down.
- Reward yourself. Even small rewards will help your emotional well-being.
- Avoid isolation. Make an effort to maintain friendships, even if it is only by telephone in the beginning.
- Look into parenting classes to learn new methods for helping children develop self-esteem, confidence, accountability, and responsibility.

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