



FLORIDA SENIOR LEGAL HELPLINE

1-888/895-7873

Guidance for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Sometimes grandparents must step in to become the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. This can happen when a child's parent dies, becomes disabled, is incarcerated, or must travel for work. If you become the caretaker of your grandchildren, there are steps you should take:

I. Obtain and organize important documents

Make up a binder/folder to keep paperwork relevant to the child(ren):

- ✓ Birth certificates for child
- ✓ Death certificates for parent(s), if applicable
- ✓ Social security cards
- ✓ Medical and dental records
- ✓ Insurance policies/cards
- ✓ Legal authority (power of attorney, custody order, etc.)
- ✓ Consent forms signed by parents
- ✓ School papers
- ✓ Citizenship papers or child's passport, if needed and/or available
- ✓ Any military documents confirming parent's military status

II. Contact the necessary government or Legal Services agencies

Social Security Administration (SSA): You may be able to apply for Social Security survivors or dependent benefits for the child of a deceased or disabled wage earner. You will need to provide proof of the parent's death or disability to the SSA as well as the child's birth certificate. If a grandchild receives benefits while in your care, you may want to apply to be their representative payee. This would allow you to manage their benefits on their behalf. To apply, you must complete form SSA-11 (Request to be selected as payee) and show documents to prove your identity. You will also need to provide your Social Security number and complete an interview with the SSA over the telephone or in person. If there are no survivor or dependent benefits available on the parents' records and the child is economically dependent on you, you may be able to apply for benefits for the child on your own SSA record. To get started, call the toll-free number for the SSA, 1-800-772-1213, or access their website at <https://www.ssa.gov/>.

Veteran's Administration (VA): The VA provides pension benefits to unmarried dependent children of deceased veterans with wartime service. Children generally must be between the ages of 18-26 to receive educational benefits. For surviving children of non-wartime veterans, a special benefit entitled "Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)" may be available if the veteran died of service-related injuries or conditions. A VA counselor can help review the programs with you to determine eligibility. Contact your local Veterans Services Office for free assistance: <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/vso-search>.

Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF): DCF administers several programs to benefit financially eligible children and their families, including *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* (SNAP), also known as food stamps; the *Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program* (TANF) and the *Relative Caregiver Program*, which provide cash assistance; and *Medicaid* which is a government health insurance program. If the children live with you, you can apply for them and yourself. You don't need to adopt or obtain an official custody order. In contrast, children who participate in the Relative Caregiver program *must have been adjudicated dependent* by a court. Applications for all the DCF programs can be made through a single form online. <https://dcf-access.dcf.state.fl.us/access/index.do>, or by calling the Customer Call Center at 1-850-300-4323 to ask for the nearest community partner location where you can be helped in-person.

Legal Help: Obtain temporary custody of the minor child. You may be able to petition the court for temporary custody. **This allows you to act as a parent for a child who lives with you and is not your child.** Examples of what you can do with a court order include: consent to medical treatment; obtain medical and school records; enroll the child in school; and consent to participating in school activities. Although the legal action is referred to as "temporary custody", the authority granted in this proceeding may last until the child attains the age of eighteen. Contact Florida Senior Legal Helpline, 1-888-795-7873, your local Legal Aid office, or the Lawyer Referral Service for the Florida Bar Association to request assistance.

Resources for Relative Caregivers

Children's Home Network: Serves relative caregivers in Broward, Hillsborough, Miami-Dade, Orange, Osceola, Pasco, Pinellas. and Seminole counties. Assistance can be given for finding resources such as legal and counseling services, applying for public benefits as well as food and clothing. Intake line- 1 (888) 920-8761. Website: <https://childrenshomenetwork.org/kinship>

Turning 18: Provides resources and information for caregivers of a developmentally disabled adult. Includes detailed information about supported decision making, advance directives, guardian advocacy and guardianships to help determine which are appropriate. Forms for supported decision-making agreements and guardian advocacy are available at <https://www.turning18.org>. The website also includes resources for young people aging out of foster care.

Florida State Foster/Adoptive Parent Association: Offers a list of extensive resources for foster and adoptive parents including medical foster care, kinship care, dealing with trauma, and independent living. Includes a FAQs section that addresses financial assistance including applying for public benefits at <https://floridafapa.org/kinship-care>.

