Parenting for grandparents and other relative carers

SECOND EDITION

Child Safety Commissioner promoting the safety and wellbeing of children

State Government of Victoria
Acknowledgements

A number of organisations contributed to the development of this resource.

Foster Care Association of Victoria

Grandparents Victoria

Mirabel Foundation

Aboriginal Children and Families Unit, Division of Children, Youth and Families, Department of Human Services.

Early Years Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Placement and Support Unit, Division of Children, Youth and Families, Department of Human Services.

The Development of the resource was managed by Priscilla Seyfort, Office of The Child Safety Commissioner.

Published by the Child Safety Commissioner, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

May 2011


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Also available at www.ocsc.vic.gov.au or phone the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner on 03 8601 5884.

Designed and produced by Caridi Design Pty Ltd.
Parenting for grandparents and other relative carers

For a child, it is incredibly important to know that their wider family is there for them, to love them and support them, when their parents can’t be there. We know that children and young people maintain a sense of security when being cared for by people they know, who can provide safety, stability and meet their developmental needs.

That is why we acknowledge and support the growing number of family members who take on the incredibly rewarding role of caring for a child.

Caring is often a long-term commitment and may present challenges to carers, particularly if they have not parented in a while or had a child of their own. So, family support and guidance needs to be available through both good and challenging times.

The Victorian Government celebrates the fact that a growing number of people in our community are stepping up to take on the care of relative children. We also recognise that sometimes people need a hand.

The Office of Child Safety Commissioner has put together this guide to assist carers with issues that may arise and provide some explanations, suggestions and useful contacts for additional advice and support.

I trust this guide will be helpful to you in your day-to-day role as a carer.

Thank you for your ongoing and important contribution.

Hon Mary Wooldridge MP
Minister for Community Services
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Message from the Child Safety Commissioner

As parents we have coped with the challenges and frustrations and enjoyed the good times shared with our sons or daughters as they grow up. However, some of us take on this job twice. When members of our family, or sometimes close friends need our help, we take on parenting again. Indeed, there are some who have even taken on the full responsibility of parenting a relative without any personal experience of parenting at all.

You may be a grandparent caring for a grandchild. However aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers or other extended family members can be ‘parents’ expectedly or unexpectedly when the need arises. If you have not been a parent for a while, you could find that it is different today. This booklet tries to be encouraging without underestimating the challenges that might be encountered. It talks about child development and behaviour you might expect and other issues which might arise unexpectedly. It tells you where to find services for the children and yourself.

When children move to live with you, they will often come with some stress due to what is happening in their parents’ lives at that time. On your part, you will be caring for the child, but also caring or concerned about the parents. We recognise this double commitment, and have written this booklet to help you navigate the complexities of children’s needs, parental involvement, family support and the importance of recognising and addressing your own needs.

We hope this revised booklet helps you to meet the circumstances in your family. Most importantly, we hope that it makes you feel that you are not alone and that emotional and practical supports are available when you need them.

Bernie Geary OAM
Child Safety Commissioner
This booklet has been written for grandparents who are the fulltime carers of their grandchildren and for other members of the extended family who are caring for children.

Relative care, also referred to as ‘kinship care’, is the fastest growing type of care in Australia and overseas. Carers may be brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, step-relatives or family friends, but the majority are grandparents. Across Australia, of the children in out-of-home care there were 46% in relative/kinship care. At 30 June 2010 there were 2185 were in statutory care with relative carers in Victoria (Australian Institute of Health Welfare 2011, pp 48 &49)

Relatives can take on fulltime responsibility for the care of a child for a number of reasons. The parent may have problems with drugs and/or alcohol, or a serious mental illness, and cannot adequately care for a child. The parent may be seriously ill, or have a disability, or may be in prison. In some instances the child’s parent may have died.

If you are a relative carer, you are making a vital contribution to the child’s future wellbeing and a wonderful contribution to the community at large. You are performing the most important role in the world in providing the love, care and security that all children need.
Your new situation

You may be feeling many different emotions now that you have taken on the care of your grandchildren, nieces, nephews, brothers and sisters, or other relatives. You know you have much love and support to offer them, but you may have some mixed feelings. You may feel a longing for the retirement years you had planned, or you may have looked forward to time for hobbies or holidays and be disappointed that these may need to be put on hold. You might also have less time available to you to spend with friends and other family members.

On the other hand, your life circumstances may be quite different. You may not have parented before. You may be working or studying and may have children of your own living at home. You may also be already caring for children of other family members.

In Aboriginal culture, kinship or relative care is a widespread practice. Children are seen as the responsibility of the entire family, not just the biological parents. Many Aboriginal people have been brought up by family members other than their parents. Grandparents are vital members of the family unit and often play a significant role in child rearing (Bourke, 1993).

Your health and wellbeing

Your health and sense of wellbeing may be affected by the responsibility of caring for the child. You may be worried about your health and the physical and emotional demands of caring for a child. In addition, you may also be coping with your own confusion, grief or anger in relation to the inability of the parents to care for the children.

Financial concerns

You probably hadn’t planned to have dependent children at this time in your life and you may worry about how you will financially support the growing needs of these children. You may also experience the distress and the costs of legal action. Even if financial issues were not previously of concern, the children’s extra needs such as bedding, toys, school uniforms, books and food will impact upon your household budget. The publications, Financial supports for grandparents and other relative carers, and Legal issues for grandparents and other relative carers, published by the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner may help you gain legal assistance and identify your eligibility for financial supports.

“Being a kinship carer certainly has challenges, but the joys far outweigh the sleepless nights and empty wallets. Each day my husband and I have the opportunity to be part of my nieces’ and nephews’ experience of life. Our motivation comes from watching them dream big and gain courage for their lives.

Relative carer, Melbourne, 2008
The good news is…

Your role as carer of this child (or children) is extremely important, despite its many challenges. You are providing them with the unconditional love and care they so desperately need.

Research has shown that most children and adolescents like living with their grandparents, often more so than living with their parents. The study showed that children liked the feelings of love, trust, security and safety in contrast to their former often traumatic lives.¹

Other benefits of relative care that children appreciate include:

- the sense of their family being kept together
- that they are still with their family, rather than ‘in care’
- softening of the trauma of being separated from their parents
- the ease of keeping contact with parents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

There are benefits likely for you as well:

- children can bring additional joy, activity and spontaneity to your life
- it can be very rewarding and enjoyable watching children develop and grow up.

Parenting today

There are many challenges when parenting the second time around. On the other hand, for some relative carers this may be your first experience of parenting.

Today’s children:

- seem to be growing up more quickly
- are part of the rapidly changing technological age
- are exposed to more sex, violence and drugs in the media
- have access to the internet with its seemingly limitless content.

Community attitudes and standards around parenting have changed:

- physical punishment is no longer an acceptable form of discipline
- everybody seems to have a theory about parenting and there is much talk about child rearing in the media and by politicians.

Parenting is always a challenge and issues change as children move from one stage of development to another. However you are not alone. Others like you are facing these challenges. You may find it useful to attend some parenting classes or join a grandparent group to support you as you work through these issues.

¹. Downie, J. et al 2004 The Perceived Experiences of Children and Adolescents living with their Grandparents: “Why living with my Grandparents is so...good”.
This child’s previous experiences

A child may have already experienced significant trauma by the time they come to live with you. (For more about this see following section, *The child’s experience*). While usually loved, some of these children may have had chaotic and disrupted lives. They may have been neglected or abused as a result of their parent’s drug or alcohol abuse, or their parent may have a mental illness.

The child may oppose your attempts to provide a stable, nurturing environment with regular and consistent routines. Try to remember that they are struggling with new expectations. The situation will improve as they learn to trust their more stable and safe environment. You may also be dealing with your own grief for your son or daughter. As well as dealing with your own feelings of sadness or shock, you have the extra challenge of meeting this child’s emotional and physical needs.

“The opportunity we have to unconditionally love these kids is absolutely worth the world.”

Relative carer,
Melbourne, 2008
Family dynamics
As part of getting used to your new circumstances you may have to think about some of the changes or issues you may face:

- you may have less time with your partner
- you may have interrupted sleep
- children still living at home may feel negative about the children’s arrival
- your home will probably be busier, noisier, messier and more cluttered
- you may be less available to help your other adult children with their children
- you may not have the energy or capacity to attend or host family functions
- if your own parents are still alive, you may feel especially stretched
- there may be mixed reactions and different levels of support from other family members.

The changes in your family relationships demand time and energy from everyone. Other family members’ emotions and questions can be draining. You might consider whether a local counsellor or mediation centre could help by holding a family meeting to answer questions and make a family plan. Sometimes this outside assistance can be helpful, and may make life easier for you. At times other family members may be able to help you or help in planning the future.

The future
You will often think about the future. Sometimes it is not clear whether or when the child’s parents will be able to care for the child. You may change in your hopes and opinions on this. If you are caring for a child because of a court order you need to be able to talk freely to the social worker responsible for planning the child’s future, and to take part in planning for this future.

Mixed feelings about your own health and other plans may make thinking ahead a complicated and worrying business.

It is important to be able to talk about these things with other family members, from the time the child comes to you. Your plans for the future may need to be revised as your circumstances change.
The child’s experience

The child (or children) coming to live with you in your family may have experienced some degree of trauma due to being separated from their parents and perhaps because of neglect and/or abuse.

Trauma affects children differently, depending on their temperament and on how resilient they are:

- the child’s response to their previous trauma will cause them to behave in different ways. Some may be disruptive and aggressive while others are quiet and withdrawn
- try to look behind the acting-out behaviour. Much of this behaviour comes from pain. Often they don’t behave like other children—but this is because they can’t, not because they won’t
- remember: each child is unique. Each will vary in the way they feel about their situation
- some of the emotions the child may be experiencing include grief and abandonment, guilt, anger, fear, anxiety, insecurity, embarrassment, hope and fantasy.

Some emotions the child may be experiencing:

“To understand your grandchild’s behaviour, it helps to understand what he or she is going through. In the turmoil of the shattered family, children are the most affected and the least prepared to understand or talk about it. A small child can’t turn around and say, ‘I am angry because my mother abandoned me and I’m afraid it might be my fault’. Instead, she may act out her feelings. She may become aggressive at school or depressed and withdrawn; she may have difficulty sleeping, wet her bed, or revert to baby talk. The types of emotional problems a child experiences and their severity will depend on the individual child, on how much trauma she survived, and on the child’s age and stage of development when she moves in with you. However, most grandchildren will experience a similar set of intense overlapping feelings.”

(From Grandparents as Parents: A Survival Guide for Raising a Second Family, 1995)
This section has been adapted from *Grandparents as Parents: A Survival Guide to Raising a Second Family* 1995.

### Grief and abandonment

Every child separated from their parents will experience some sense of loss, and therefore grief:

- as well as grief they may also feel abandoned and rejected
- you may be experiencing your own feelings of loss and grief because it is your child or sibling who is unable to parent due to drug or alcohol abuse, mental or other illness
- the child may express their grief through anger, sadness, depression, confusion, nightmares, forgetfulness
- however, they may also be joyful, wanting to block things out, and wanting to play with friends and socialise.

It is important that you talk to a child, in a way appropriate to his or her age, about where they are living and the immediate future. Several studies have found that children need to know what is happening.

Children have mixed emotions about mum and dad. They may repeatedly ask if mum or dad is coming back, or have swings in mood about their parents. However, studies have shown that many children understand some of the contradictions.

### Guilt

Children often feel responsible, and thus guilty, for a family crisis that takes their parent away from them. These guilty feelings can be more intense if the child has come from an abused or neglected situation.

The children in your care may also feel they’re a burden on you and your lifestyle.

### Anger

Children might be angry because:

- their parents are not there
- their parents may have broken promises to them
- abuse or neglect has left them angry, unhappy or unsure what to expect.

Because of their anger, children may resist your attempts to impose routines and rules, and limits to what was their previously chaotic lifestyle.

You can help children by:

- trying not to take their anger personally
- reassuring them that it is OK to feel angry
- telling them you understand why they feel hurt and confused
- helping them to verbalise their feelings
- reminding them that hitting and threatening are not acceptable.
Fear, anxiety and insecurity

These feelings are to be expected when children have led disrupted, stressful and sometimes chaotic lives. Ordinary routines can be challenging.

The children in your care may:

♦ be uncertain about what to expect or how to behave
♦ distrust adults because their parents have been untrustworthy
♦ be anxious that their parents will, or won’t, come back
♦ worry about your health and long term ability to care for them.

“...the understandings of these children are complicated; they love their caregiver, yet hope to live with their mother; they understand that their mother cannot care for them, yet yearn for a time when she can. The fluidity with which these children understand their familial relationships is an important aspect of their adjustment.”

Messing, 2006
Tips to help children cope with trauma

All children need to express their feelings and thoughts about what they have been through. This may be with you, or with someone else close to them. It may be through actions, in drama, play or even art or music—it is not always just talking. Some children appreciate meeting others who are also living with a relative.

If the child’s fears and anxieties don’t respond to love, hugs and consistent routines, you may consider asking for help from a counsellor or someone from an early childhood service who can help a child to talk about their feelings.

You know that above all, the children in your care need to feel loved and safe and that it is important to:

◆ reassure them, give them positive reinforcement and praise
◆ tell them they are not responsible for their parents’ absence
◆ provide a loving, safe environment with a consistent and predictable daily routine
◆ make sure they sleep in the same bed each night and that their clothes and toys are stored in the same bedroom each day
◆ have regular meal times
◆ make sure they keep regular school hours.

One of the boys is 18 now and often tells us that it was hard for him to come and live with us. He had to change his whole lifestyle. The children came from a drug and alcohol addicted family… on the dole, streetwise, violence.. no boundaries or rules, to our so called ‘normal’ home (what is normal?) where both carers had worked, a home with meals on the table, restrictions on bedtimes, going out, proper food, schooling, no crime… Just simple things like cleaning teeth, having two sheets on a bed …having to eat fruit and vegetables, things we take for granted. These were major changes for the three children coming into our home.

(Kinship care report, DHS 2007)
How children may behave – and what you can do

Children may display all, some or none of the behaviours that are listed below.2

**Excessive clinging**

The child may follow you to the bathroom, insist on sitting on your lap and may not like to let you out of their sight. They are ‘clinging’ to you because they are terrified of being forgotten or left.

Clinging can make you feel worn down and frazzled. Remember that it takes time, reassurance and positive reinforcement to develop trust again and to feel safe and secure.

The clinginess will usually settle down but may return in times of stress or change.

**Babyish or immature behaviour**

As well as clinging to you, a child may revert to babyish behaviour such as returning to nappies or using a bottle. They may suck their thumb, talk in ‘baby talk’, want to be carried and wet the bed (see section on bedwetting below).

If they start to ‘go backwards’, don’t panic. They are behaving like this because they feel insecure, threatened or rejected due to the enormous changes that have occurred in their young lives.

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You can help by:

- reassuring them that you love them just as they are
- telling them how important they are but that they are no longer a baby
- talking about the advantages of being a bigger boy or girl now.

A photo album showing a child’s journey from babyhood to infancy to childhood will give them a strong sense of their identity and how they have grown over their life.

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2. Parts of this section have been adapted from Grandparents as Parents: A Survival Guide to Raising a Second Family, 1995.
Sleeping difficulties

Sleeping problems are common when children have led disrupted lives. They may be afraid of the dark, have nightmares, or want to sleep with you. Going to bed may bring back fears of waking up in a strange environment or of being separated from you.

You can help make bedtime a happy and comforting time by:
- establishing a bedtime routine
- chatting about the day and any plans you may have for tomorrow
- reassuring them that you will be there if they get scared at night and when they wake in the morning
- reading a bedtime story
- back-rubbing and singing can help if a child can’t sleep or wakes from a nightmare
- providing a night light in the bedroom or hallway.

Their sleeping patterns will eventually settle down, giving you the rest and privacy that you need so much.

Bedwetting

Bedwetting in children is very common. A small proportion of teenagers and adults wet the bed too.

Bedwetting is not a disease and is not caused by laziness or naughtiness so punishment is not appropriate. It can be a symptom of stress and distress.

Children can be very deep sleepers and some develop urinary control later than others. Try to be patient and sympathetic because children can suffer embarrassment and distress about bedwetting. They might refuse to go to sleepovers, school camps and other social events.

You can help by:
- remaining calm and patient
- avoiding yelling or showing disgust.
- taking practical precautions with bed protectors so that the impact of an occurrence is minimised.

Don’t:
- restrict a child’s fluids
- wake them while sleeping to take them to the toilet
- embarrass the child by talking about their bedwetting to other people.

Where to get help:
- your doctor
- a paediatrician
- your local community health centre
- Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) Tel: 13 2229.
Most children stop bedwetting as they grow older. Relapses can be a sign of stress, but sometimes children who have been dry for some time relapse for no apparent reason and no source of stress can be identified.

**Food and mealtimes**

The child may refuse to eat, hoard food, eat too quickly, or use mealtimes as a way of getting your attention.

Try to find out if medical or other problems are behind these food problems. A change to a child’s eating habits may be a sign of depression. Is the child also becoming withdrawn or having trouble sleeping? If so, you may want to seek professional advice.

Children benefit from regular, consistent and predictable eating routines. Try to provide a nutritious, well-balanced diet. This may be difficult if their diet hasn’t been balanced prior to coming to your care. Teaching good eating habits involves patience and consistency.

Don’t withhold meals as punishment. Eating should be a safe and reliable experience for a child, not something to be earned.
Manipulative behaviour

All children will test limits as a way of learning their boundaries in the world and discovering what behaviour is acceptable and what is not.

Your joint roles of grandparent (or aunt, uncle, or other) and parent may confuse and complicate the challenges of rearing your grandchildren (niece, nephew or other) and you may feel you are less able to indulge them.

If the child’s early parenting was erratic, unstable or inconsistent, your task will be especially challenging. Children may resist your attempts to impose structure and rules in their lives. They may continually test the limits and you may feel they are trying to push you away.

Challenging behaviours: positive strategies

The following strategies may assist you as you try to cope with challenging or difficult behaviour.³

Positive Strategies

Set a clear daily routine
It cannot be overstated: children benefit from consistency and predictability.

Offer positive choices
Allow children to make choices about things in their life that may be incidental to you but which give them a sense of control and decision making. For example, they could choose what book they read, or what colour clothes they wear.

State rules in the positive: ‘I want you to…’
Tell children what you want them to do, rather than what you don’t want them to do. Stating rules positively will give the child an opportunity to achieve something, rather than simply avoiding punishment.

Set limits and stick to them
Limits provide children with a sense of security and an understanding of what is expected of them.

Present a united front
A consistent approach is important, so try to ensure that decision-making is clear and consistent between you and your partner.

Separate feelings and actions
It is important to acknowledge that the child’s feelings are valid. Show them that you understand that they are feeling sad, mad or upset, but that these feelings are not an excuse for poor behaviour or breaking limits.

Try to stay calm
As difficult as it may sometimes be, try to remain calm and rational as much as possible. The children in your care look to you for a sense of order and security.

³ Parts of this section have been adapted from Grandparents as Parents: A Survival Guide to Raising a Second Family, 1995.
If you want advice or assistance with parenting, call Parentline on 13 2289.

Parentline provides a confidential statewide telephone counselling service to parents and carers of children aged from birth to 18 years. Professional counsellors are able to explore a variety of issues that impact on parenting and relationships. They can also put you in touch with other appropriate services.

A helpful website is the Raising Children Network www.raisingchildren.net.au It includes sections under ‘Grownups’ and ‘Parents like me’ about grandparent and kinship care.
Children need support and guidance from you and other people who are close to them, to deal with the changes in their lives. As well as the strategies outlined above for dealing with challenging behaviour, below are some positive parenting ideas for you to keep in mind.

The following parenting strategies have been adapted from *Grandparents as Parents: A Survival Guide for Raising a Second Family*:

**Avoid overcompensating**
If you are a grandparent and have the primary role of raising and disciplining your grandchildren you cannot always be the doting and indulging grandparent you may have liked to be. Merging the two roles of grandparent and parent can create confusion and anxiety for you and the child.

Try to avoid the trap of always trying to make up for what has happened to the children in your care. This can take the form of excessive treats or surprises, making allowances for unacceptable behaviour, or not setting limits.

Overcompensating will not help children mature into responsible adults. Your most precious gift to them is to provide a positive role model and a combination of consistent nurturing and discipline.

**Reward good behaviour**
- Instead of only giving children attention for bad behaviour, reward them for good behaviour.
- Praise them when they do something you like and encourage them by telling them how much you appreciate their efforts to behave well.

**Avoid physical punishment**
- There is a fine line between physical punishment and abuse.
- Hitting children teaches them that aggression and anger are acceptable ways of solving problems.
- Teach children that there are logical consequences to their actions.

**Make your consequences logical and appropriate**
Try to link punishment to behaviour. For example, if the child throws all their books on the floor, ask them to put them back in the cupboard.
Make consequences immediate
Consequences have more impact if they are immediate.

Reinforce cause and effect
Make sure the child understands the relationship between what they have done and the consequences of their actions.

Teach responsibility
Discipline involves teaching children to regulate themselves by learning to make choices and to take responsibility for the consequences.

Follow through
- It is important not to threaten children. Work out consequences for the child’s actions that you are prepared to follow through.
- Of course, following through to make children learn about consequences doesn’t apply in a situation where the child’s safety, or anyone else’s safety, is affected.

Act on the most important issues
Identify which of the child’s behaviours you need to act on and which you can ignore (or to which you can react by calmly distracting them).

Avoid overcompensating
Reward good behaviour
Avoid physical punishment
Make your consequences logical and appropriate
Make consequences immediate
Reinforce cause and effect
Teach responsibility
Follow through
Act on the most important issues
Services for young children

The Victorian Government department responsible for early childhood services is the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. It plays a role in supporting the provision of quality services available for children from when they are born until they go to school. These include:

♦ Early Childhood Intervention services  
♦ Maternal and Child Health services  
♦ Playgroup  
♦ Family day care  
♦ Child care centres  
♦ Kindergarten.

Early Childhood Intervention services

Early Childhood Intervention services support children with a disability or developmental delay from birth to school entry. They support the families of these children and provide special education, therapy, counselling, service planning and coordination, and assistance to access services such as kindergarten and child care.

Services are tailored to meet the child’s individual needs. They focus on supporting the child in their everyday environments and in their everyday experiences and activities.

Maternal and Child Health services

These services are free for all Victorian families with children aged 0-6 years. They offer support, information and advice about parenting, child health and development, child behaviour, maternal health and wellbeing, child safety, immunisation, nutrition and family planning.

All maternal and child health centres are staffed by registered nurses with qualifications in midwifery and family and child health.

Playgroup

Playgroup is for children aged 0–4 years and their parents and carers. About 36,000 families attend playgroup each week in Victoria, at community venues such as Maternal and Child Health centres, kindergartens, halls, community centres and primary schools.

For more information, see Playgroup Victoria at www.playgroup.org.au

Family day care

Family day care is provided for children aged 0-5 years in the carer’s own home. Coordination units, which are usually located within local councils, support the network of carers.
Child care centres

Child care is provided for 0–6 year olds, and will usually involve a mix of qualified and other staff. Education and care programs are based on the developmental needs, interests and experience of each child. Centres typically operate for at least eight hours a day on normal working days, for a minimum of 48 weeks per year.

Some child care centres also have kindergarten programs, which may be something to take into account when choosing a centre.

Grandparents on a pension are able to get free child care for children under school age, and working grandparents get child care at a subsidised rate.

See also **Financial support for grandparents and other relative carers**, produced by the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner.

A copy can be obtained by downloading or ordering hard copies by visiting [www.ocsc.vic.gov.au](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au) or by calling 03 8601 5884.

If you are eligible for the Child Care Benefit you may be eligible for the Child Care Tax Rebate

For information about approved child care services and vacancies in your area phone the Child Care Access Hotline on 1800 670 305 (TTY 1800 639 327). The Customer Service Adviser at Centrelink will give you information about eligibility for Child Care Benefit and Grandparent Child Care Benefit. You can also phone the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150 (TTY 1800 810 586), Multilingual Services on 13 1202 or visit the website at [www.familyassist.gov.au](http://www.familyassist.gov.au)
Immunisation

- Immunisation is highly recommended to protect babies, infants and children from childhood illnesses and diseases, some of which may be life threatening. Children and babies can get free immunisation for a range of diseases including chickenpox, polio, meningococcal disease, whooping cough, measles, mumps and rubella.

- All children need a school entry immunisation certificate before they start school to show whether or not they have been vaccinated.

- The certificate is issued by the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) or you can contact your local council.

If you would like information about immunisation you can contact:

- Your GP
- Your local Council immunisation service
- Immunisation Program, Department of Health, Vic.
  Phone: 1300 882 008
- The Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hr service)
  Phone: 13 22 29
- Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR)
  Phone: 1800 653 809  Fax: 02 6124 6672 (Policy Officer)
Children with special needs

The child in your care may have autism, a learning disorder, a disability, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), severe emotional and psychological problems or have been born drug or alcohol affected.

If children have special needs, the challenges of raising them are much greater. It would be quite normal if you often feel frustrated, lonely, isolated, unsupported and even at times despairing.

Don’t hesitate to seek advice, help and support from others. Hopefully, doing so will give you a sense of comfort and relief.

- If you’re worried about the child’s behaviour, you could approach a Maternal and Child Health Nurse, child care staff, kindergarten teacher, school staff (principal or class teacher), local community health centre, your family doctor or a paediatrician.
- They may give you tips on how to manage the child’s behaviour and provide you with some moral support.
- If there is a possibility that a child has ADHD, autism, or learning difficulties, it is a good idea to have them evaluated by a well-trained professional such as a child psychologist, psychiatrist or a paediatrician. They will discuss options with you, including counselling and early childhood support activities.

The Association for Children with a Disability is a good contact point for carers of children with various levels of disability. They have regular newsletters and support activities, and can help you to find out about the help available.

Phone: 9818 2000 (or rural callers 1800 654 013)
www.acd.org.au
Parenting adolescents

Adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood. This period of enormous change involves physical changes (puberty), and social and psychological changes, as young people move to increased independence. The length of adolescence seems to have increased since previous generations. Today’s young people often put off making major life decisions and long term commitments such as choosing a career and a lifelong partner.

Adolescence can be great fun as you watch a young person gradually move to independent living. But it can also be a time of stress and challenge. It may test your patience and love. You may grieve for that sweet affectionate child you have lost. But if you are a grandparent you have been through adolescence with your own children. You know that they do grow up.

You may decide to do things differently the second time around. Below are some strategies for coping with this often turbulent time. They have been adapted from the PACE (Parenting Adolescents a Creative Experience) program.

Be aware that the adult world can be confronting and confusing for adolescents. The following suggestions may help:

- Spend time doing things with them. Invite them to play you some of the music they like and to discuss what they’re interested in.
- Talk with them about the experiences they choose to share with you and enjoy this time.
- Don’t panic if this adolescent child questions your ideas and values—it’s a normal part of developing their own identity.
- Remind yourself that adolescence is a time for young people to try out new ways of living for when they become adults. Much adolescent behaviour is experimental and won’t last.
- Try to stay calm and confident by taking time for yourself as well as the adolescent you are caring for.
  - Plan some happy times together. Ask them how they would like to spend time with you. Don’t expect too much, as friendships outside the family are important to adolescents.
  - Accept that through much of the adolescent phase, this child is growing away from your world into other relationships.
  - Be aware that your ‘parenting’ role is entering a new phase as you support them in their path to independence.
  - Plan happy times for you and your partner, or with other family members and friends. If you care for yourself, you will be an excellent role model for them.

More help with parenting adolescents can be obtained by ringing Parentline on 13 2289.
Safety

Child safety in the home is a special consideration, especially if you haven’t had young children living with you for many years, or perhaps ever before.

Is your home environment safe for a child? Think about the potential child safety issues around your home.

For example:

- Are medicines, poisons and other dangerous products kept out of reach and locked up in child proof cabinets?
- If you have a pool, is it fenced?
- Do you have a secure front fence?
- Are power cords safe and out of reach?
- Are small objects out of the reach of babies, infants and toddlers who could swallow or inhale them?
- Do heaters have protective guards?
- Do you have approved car seats or child boosters fitted to your car?
- Are toys safe and appropriate for the age of the child?
- Is your hot water service set to a safe temperature to reduce the risk of scalds?

Contacts

In an emergency call 000.

Victorian Poisons Information Centre .............................................. 13 11 26
If the child has collapsed, ring 000 for an ambulance
DO NOT ring the Poisons Information Centre

Kidsafe Vic Inc. .......................................................... 03 9251 7725
www.kidsafe.com.au

Royal Childrens Hospital Safety Centre
Telephone Advisory Line ......................................................... 03 9345 5085
www.rch.org.au/safetycentre

Nurse on Call .................................................. 1300 606 024

Office of the Child Safety Commissioner .................................. 1300 782 884
www.ocsc.vic.gov.au

Click onto Child Safety Web-links to quality information about 18 areas of child safety.
Cyber safety: 
helping children to stay safe on line

It is useful to think about the internet as a public place that anyone can enter. Just as you take steps to protect children’s safety when out in public places like parks, shops or walking down the street, you need to take steps to protect their safety when using the internet. There are risks related to what children may look at or download and what they themselves post or upload on to the internet.

The children in your care may know more about the technology than you. But you have invaluable life experience and wisdom and they need this to help guide them safely through the world of the internet. Spending time together exploring these new technologies (either at home or in places such as the library) can be fun and an opportunity to develop some shared interests.

Some of the risks you need to be aware of are:

- seeing inappropriate or harmful material: some of the information, pictures and videos on the internet are sexually explicit, violent or racist
- stranger danger: paedophiles use the internet to communicate with and ‘groom’ children through activities like chat rooms and games. Once contact is made, a paedophile may try to get a child to send photos or videos of themselves, or they may try to meet with the child
- harassment, bullying and loss of privacy: the internet can be misused to communicate things that are false, malicious or private or to send messages that are threatening or offensive. Bullying which may start at school can follow a child home through messages on computers and mobile phones
- financial: there are lots of businesses trying to get your money on the internet. Some are legitimate, others are frauds and others unfairly target children
- viruses and spyware: as you may be aware the internet also
contains some computer virus programs and spyware that can be downloaded without this being immediately obvious—causing damage to the computer or loss of privacy for you
◆ incorrect information: children use the internet to do research and sometimes what they find is untrue, out of date or misleading
◆ spending so much time on line that it becomes unhealthy. The desire to stay connected 24 hours a day, seven days a week or to play online games without stopping can have an adverse impact on the health and wellbeing of kids.

It is important to remember that stuff happens. Promise to help, not punish. Studies have shown that many children do not tell their parents when something bad happens on the internet because they fear their parents will respond by banning them from accessing the internet.

If you have not yet had the opportunity to learn how to use computers and the internet, ask someone to show you or take a course. Once you are familiar with the technology you will learn how to check the ‘History’ so you can see which internet sites children have accessed.

You will also learn how you can do an internet search of the child’s name from time to time, or the names of other children in your care. This may show you what information they or others have put on the internet using their name or details.

For more information about internet safety, free filters for your computer and ways of teaching kids about internet safety:
◆ have a look at NetAlert at www.netalert.gov.au or
◆ call them for advice on 1800 880 176.
Other helpful resources and contacts are included at the back of this booklet.

There are things you can do to support children to stay safe on the internet:
◆ know which internet sites children are visiting, who they have contact with and what they are doing
◆ keep your computer in a common area of the house, not a bedroom
◆ closely supervise young children when they use the internet.
◆ talk to children about the risks of internet use and about how they can reduce the risks
◆ if the children in your care attend school, ask the school what programs they have in place to teach children about internet safety. If they do not have any, suggest they start some
◆ build some barriers to help block inappropriate or harmful material by using a family-friendly internet service provider and installing a filter on your computer
◆ set some rules about the kinds of sites that can be accessed on the internet, and set time limits for internet usage.
Education

Whether children are at kindergarten, primary or secondary school, the education system is complex and constantly changing: the following introduction may be helpful. You can also obtain a booklet, Welcome to School: A Parent’s Guide to Victorian Government Schools by phoning Information Victoria on 1300 366 356, or at www.education.vic.gov.au.

Kindergarten

Kindergarten is a one-year education program for four-year-old children, undertaken in the year before commencing school. Most children attend kindergarten but it is not compulsory. Kindergartens are staffed by a trained kindergarten teacher and also a kindergarten assistant.

Kindergarten provides children with fun opportunities for play while also promoting physical, emotional, social and intellectual development. At kindergarten children begin to develop and extend friendship networks as well as developing skills which assist in preparing them for school. If you have any concerns about the child’s behaviour or development, speak to the kindergarten teacher.

Kindergartens are a good place to meet families with children of a similar age before they go to school. They also have useful links with other community organisations and service providers in your neighbourhood. Children’s learning is promoted in a stimulating and fun environment and the teacher can provide you with information about the child’s development and progress.

When you enrol a child in kindergarten, you will need to provide the following information:

- the child’s name, address and details of any special needs
- information about parents, carers and guardians
- who to notify in case of an emergency
- any court orders relating to the child
- details of people who can collect the child
- medical, health and immunisation status.

For more information about kindergarten, contact your local kindergarten or the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development on 1300 731 947 or at www.education.vic.gov.au.
Primary school enrolment

Most primary schools start taking enrolments in May each year for the following year. To enrol a child, the school needs:

- evidence of the child’s date of birth
- names and addresses of the child, the parents (if appropriate), guardians and carers
- any court orders relating to the child
- your phone number and email address if available
- names and contact details of emergency contacts
- doctor’s and dentist’s names and phone numbers
- immunisation status certificate
- health and welfare information—for example, does the child have asthma, diabetes, allergies, poor eyesight or hearing, specific custody arrangements
- information about the language/s the child speaks and hears—to help the school build on your child’s knowledge.

Primary schools conduct a transition program for preschool students. It is an important part of preparing a child for a successful transition to school.

If you have access to the internet, browse or search for schools and early childhood development services in Victoria, including government and non-government schools at www.education.vic.gov.au/schoolsonline

If the child is on a statutory placement with you, they should have a student support group and an individual Education Plan, as per the requirements of the DEECD and DHS Partnering Agreement: School attendance and engagement of children and young people in Out of Home Care.
School: quick facts

- Victorian children commence primary school in Prep. Children must be five years of age or older by 30 April of the year they start school.
- Children between the ages of six and 17 years must attend school.
- In Victoria, most children attend primary school from Prep to Year Six, and secondary school from Year Seven to Year 12.
- Children usually attend the school closest to where they live if they are enrolled in the state system of education. Parents or carers can select another school that may better meet the needs of their child, if there are places available. Make contact early to allow time to visit a number of schools. Principals or other staff members can provide tours, classroom visits and information.

Ways you can help support the child at school:

- establish open lines of communication with the child’s school (or kindergarden)
- let the principal and the child’s teacher know about your situation. Schools will be supportive of you and the child if they know about your family circumstances
- let the school know of any changes or disturbances in the child’s life which may have caused upset, such as weekend access with a parent
- the child’s teacher can also be a great support and resource in terms of identifying signs of a learning problem or another developmental problem
- if the child has a developmental or learning problem, share your concerns with the school and share information about the child’s behaviour and progress. If the child needs extra support or specialist assistance, the school should be able to arrange an assessment for the child. If additional support is not available, ask the school what they recommend. (Also see Children with special needs, page 21 in this booklet)
- ask the teacher what you can do at home to support the child’s learning.

Remember: try to encourage and praise the child. Focus on open communication and on the child’s strengths, whilst also encouraging them to talk about any difficulties they may be having. Encourage them to simply do their best.
Community resources and support

Your local community has many organisations, groups and places that can be valuable sources of free or inexpensive activities and resources for children and families. Some can also provide support for you as carer.

You may like to:
- visit the local park or playground
- attend story time at, or borrow books from, your local library
- borrow toys from your local toy library
- ask about playgroups or toddler groups at your local Maternal and Child Health Centre
- ask at your local council offices about community events and activities for children and families
- Look at your local government community guide.

You could also consider:
- asking your local community health centre about how their services might help you
- enquiring about holiday programs in your local community
- finding out about occasional care in your area. You may be able to get short term child care if you need a break to visit the doctor, hairdresser or go shopping alone
- attending a grandparent support group for grandparents who are the primary carers of their grandchildren (see below).

Grandparent and relative support groups
Because of the demands of looking after a young child, you may find it hard to socialise with your friends. At the same time you may not always be comfortable mixing with the parents of the child’s friends.
You could consider joining a grandparent or relative support group. There are about 20 such groups operating across Victoria, specifically for grandparents or relatives who are raising children.

Joining one of these groups will give you the opportunity to meet other grandparents in similar circumstances. You will be able to share friendship, experiences, and the joys and frustrations of parenting the second time around.

You may find it comforting to know you are not alone as you face your daily joys and challenges, and enjoy sharing stories as well as getting a few tips. It can be very helpful to talk with people who are in similar circumstances to you.

A list of grandparent groups is available at the back of this booklet.

Respite care

- You will need a break from your caring role every now and then. However, you may find that family and friends don’t fully understand what you’re going through as they are not as close as you are to the situation. They may not offer to help and it may be hard for you to ask.

- One way to lessen this is to have a family meeting to allow everyone to talk about what the child might need. Family members may have different views, but the chance to talk can result in family being more aware of your needs for a break, and others offering to include the child in outings or other events. If you wish, you may be able to ask a local counsellor or mediator to assist a family discussion of the child’s needs.

- Other respite may come from occasional camps that a child could go on, or activities that they can regularly do in the local area. Grandparents on a pension are able to get free child care for children under school age, and working grandparents get child care at a subsidised rate. There are a limited number of free activities for you and the child from services such as the Mirabel Foundation, and some other family services. (See information about the Mirabel Foundation under Useful contacts towards the end of this booklet.)

- Other respite services are respite foster care and (sometimes) family day care. Regional foster care can be organised by contacting your local Foster Care provider, or by contacting the Foster Care Association of Victoria. Your local council will know whether the family day care service is available to provide occasional respite for you.

You can contact the Foster Care Association of Victoria on 03 9489 9770
Counselling

Your new situation may cause you to think again about your earlier parenting, about family relationships, and about your past relationship with the child’s parents. If the child’s parents are misusing alcohol or drugs, you may feel guilty or despairing, especially if you have already tried to help when they had the child with them. When you deal with parenting issues you may need to talk about how it may challenge your feelings about the past. It is not unusual for some families to feel upset about the child being neglected or about a court action. Sometimes trusted friends can be helpful, however, counselling may also be an option to help with these issues. Your GP can give you a referral for counselling from a psychologist, some of which is rebatable under Medicare.

Looking after yourself

It’s very important to try to find the time to look after yourself! It is vital that, in all the focus on your child’s needs, you also look after your own health. Try to make time for relaxing activities, such as a walk or simple outings or activities you enjoy. Think and plan ahead about ways to build this into your life, and keep looking for those friends or family who may help to give you this time.

The Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria has information on healthy ageing. Visit their website at [www.cotavic.org.au](http://www.cotavic.org.au) or phone on (03) 9654 4443.
Other useful contacts

Telephone Services

- **Parentline** 13 22 89
  A telephone counselling service for parents and carers of children aged from birth to eighteen years.
  - Professional counsellors
  - Contact details for support groups
  - Contact details for community services.

- **Maternal and Child Health line 13 22 29**
  24-hour, seven day a week telephone service for families with children up to school age.
  The service has female interpreters and can help hearing or speech impaired callers.
  It is staffed by qualified maternal and child health nurses.

- **Carer Help Line** (03) 9489 9770
  Information and support for parents and carers.

- **Family Drug Help Line** 1300 660 068
  For families of drug users: (24 hour helpline)

- **Direct Line** 1800 888 236
  Drug and Alcohol Information, Support and Counselling Line (24 hour counselling and help line for drug and alcohol issues).

- **NURSE-ON-CALL** 1300 606 024
  Expert health information and advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- **Victorian Poisons Information Centre** 13 1126
  If the person has collapsed, ring 000 for an ambulance.
  DO NOT ring the Poisons Information Centre.
  **In an emergency CONTACT OOO.**

- **Post Placement Support Service**
  Information and support for carers.
  Telephone: 1300 760 566
  Email: info@ppss.org.au

Parenting Resources

- **Parenting Research Centre (PRC)**
  Level 5, 232 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne 3002
  E: info@parentingrc.org.au
  (03) 8660 3500
  www.parentingrc.org.au

- **www.raisingchildren.net.au**
  The Raising Children website offers up-to-date information topics spanning child development, behaviour, health, nutrition and fitness, play and learning, connecting and communicating, sleep and safety, for children up to school age.
  It covers newborns (0–3 months), babies (3–12 months), toddlers (1–3 years), preschoolers (3–5 years) and school-age children.

- **Better Health Channel**
  Comprehensive online health information and advice or to find your local health provider.
  www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

- **The Mirabel Foundation** 9527 9422
  PO Box 1320, Fax: 9527 9466
  St Kilda South Vic 3182
  Email: mirabel@mirabelfoundation.org

- **Kinship Care Victoria (KCV):**
  **Role of KCV**
  KCV is a peak body for grandparent and other kinship carers. KCV’s role is to support kinship carers by:
  - Identifying, promoting and representing the views and kinship carers in decisions making processes that have a bearing on the policy and practice affecting them
  - Informing and training carers in knowledge, understandings, attitudes and skills that they believe will assist them to better perform their roles as carers
  - Advocating the needs of kinship carers
  - Promoting and assisting in the delivery of programs designed to support kinship carers.

For further information contact
Anne McLeish at Kinship Carers Victoria,
14 Youlden Street, Kensington VIC 3031
Email: director@grandparents.com.au or phone 9372 2422.
Grandparent and relative support groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>LOCALITY</th>
<th>PHONE NUMBER</th>
<th>DHS REGION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nurture Until They Shine</td>
<td>Geelong (DHS)</td>
<td>5278 8122 Meets second Wed each month</td>
<td>Barwon SWest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Protection Society</td>
<td>Heidelberg</td>
<td>9450 0900 Meets fortnightly on Mon afternoons</td>
<td>North &amp; West Metro (NWMR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirabel</td>
<td>Ringwood</td>
<td>9527 9422 Support groups for Mirabel carers</td>
<td>Eastern Metro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirabel</td>
<td>Heidelberg</td>
<td></td>
<td>NWMR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mirabel</td>
<td>Sunshine</td>
<td></td>
<td>NWMR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirabel</td>
<td>Mordialloc</td>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Metro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biralee Neighbourhood House</td>
<td>Wodonga</td>
<td>02 6033 3462</td>
<td>Hume</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oz Child</td>
<td>Highton</td>
<td>9212 5600 9212 5600 group meets monthly</td>
<td>Southern Metro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oz Child</td>
<td>Frankston-Mornington</td>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Metro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent zone</td>
<td>Morwell</td>
<td>5990 8400 (Monday-Thursday) Meets fortnightly</td>
<td>Southern Metro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Also a mail network for rural families)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grandparent Support Group</td>
<td>Hampton Park Connections Uniting Care</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Parenting Again” Parentzone</td>
<td>Bayswater</td>
<td>9721 3646 Meets monthly</td>
<td>Eastern Metro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents Support Group</td>
<td>South Shepparton Community House</td>
<td>5823 3200 Meets first Thursday each month</td>
<td>Hume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinship Care Group</td>
<td>Shepparton</td>
<td>5822 8100 Meets monthly</td>
<td>Hume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colac Nuts</td>
<td>Colac</td>
<td>5278 8122 Meets first Tuesday each month</td>
<td>Barwon South/West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Organisations</td>
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Support Services

- **Grandparents Victoria** (03) 9372 2422
- **Council on Ageing** (COTA) Victoria (03) 9664 4443.
- **DHS Support to Children and Families**
  - **Child FIRST/Integrated Family Services.** Twenty four Child FIRST services have been established across Victoria to support families to find a service that meets their needs when they are concerned about a child’s wellbeing. Child FIRST provides child and family information, referral and support. It will connect you to services including Family Services. Family Services provide services to children and their families with a whole-of-family focus. A family service will enhance parenting skills, relationships between children and parents, children’s development and social connections.
  
  Please see page 37 for contact details.

Aboriginal Organisations

There is a range of Aboriginal organisations including:

- **Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)**
  139 Nicholson Street, East Brunswick Vic 3057
  (03) 8388 1855
  www.vacca.org.au

- **Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative**
  37-53 Dalmahoy Street Bairnsdale, Vic 3875
  Ph: 5152 1922

- **Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative**
  20 Rumbalara Road, Moorooroo, Vic 3629
  Ph: 5825 2111
  Lot 5 Drummond Road, Shepparton, Vic 3630
  FREECALL 1800 637 371

- **Mildura Aboriginal Corporation**
  120 Madden Street, Mildura, 3500
  Ph: 5022 1852 or 5018 4100

- **Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd**
  87 Latje Road, Robinvale, Vic 3549
  Ph: 5026 3353
Victorian Carer Card

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has produced the Victorian Carer Card.

**Program Eligibility**

To be eligible for a Carer Card an applicant must be:

- a resident of Victoria and a primary unpaid carer of a person with a disability, a severe medical condition, or a mental illness, or who is frail aged or who is in need of palliative care. This care must be provided in the home of the person requiring care, or
- a foster, respite, kinship or permanent carer in receipt of a DHS reimbursement payment, or
- a grandparent or relative carer.

A primary carer is the main provider of care and support and provides assistance, in terms of help or supervision, and assists with at least one of the following core activities:

- self care (e.g. dressing, feeding, bathing)
- communication
- mobility

A grandparent or relative carer can be either a statutory kinship carer or non-statutory kinship carer. Statutory kinship carers provide care when a Child Protection intervention has occurred and a decision has been made to place a child with relatives or a significant friend, and may also involve an order made by the Children’s Court or Family Court. Non-statutory or ‘informal’ kinship carers provide care without any Child Protection intervention. The carer is responsible for the day-to-day care, welfare and development of the child/young person. Details are available from the DHS Carer Card Information line 1800 901 958 (bus. hours), email: carercard@dhs.vic.gov.au

The Statutory Declaration for Informal Relative Carers

The Statutory Declaration for Informal Relative Carers has been developed to help informal relative carers have their carer status recognised and gain better access to services for the children in their care. An attached information booklet provides carers with details about when and how to use this form.

The statutory declaration can be accessed by contacting the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner at childsafe.vic.gov.au or 8601 5884 or from the following organisations:

- Health Services Commissioner
- Local Government Offices
- Community Legal Centres
- Aboriginal Out of Home Care Agencies
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Regional Offices
- Child First Agencies
- Family Support Agencies
- Disability Services Commissioner
- Community Health Centres
- Grandparents Victoria
- Department of Human Services Regional Offices
- The Mirabel Foundation
- Seniors Information Victoria
- Neighbourhood Houses
- Out of Home Care Agencies
It can also be downloaded from the following websites:
- www.ocsc.vic.gov.au
- www.dhs.vic.gov.au
- www.seniors.vic.gov.au
- www.cotavic.org.au
- www.education.vic.gov.au

Concessions
The State Government’s office for low income Victorians is the Department of Human Services – Victorian State Concessions. Concessions are available to low income Victorians experiencing difficulty in paying their council rates, water, gas and electricity bills. Discounts are available on essential services to ease the financial burden for low income Victorians. For each concession and/or benefit, there is an eligibility criteria. A full list of concessions, benefits and assistance available to Victorians is available on the following website: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/concessions or you can call the Department of Human Services Concessions Information Line on 1800 658 521.

Financial Counselling
If you are experiencing financial difficulty, your first point of contact is Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) who will provide you with relevant information and advice based on your circumstance and may also refer you to a financial counselling service in your area. If you are struggling to meet the costs of daily living, a financial counsellor can:
- explain your financial options and the potential consequences if you can’t pay bills, fines or other debts
- help you work out a budget and payment strategies
- support you by negotiating with your creditors (those you owe money)
- tell you about other useful government services or benefits, like bond assistance, rent or mortgage relief, or concessions for household bills
- provide information about your legal rights and options, such as bankruptcy
- show you possible ways to recover fines and costs or overcome legal action to repossess your assets
- refer you to other organisations that can help.

To find out if a financial counsellor can help you, telephone the Consumer Affairs Victoria helpline on 1300 558 181.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development student support services
General Enquiries: (03) 9637 2000 (switchboard) or contact your local Regional office of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

The Mirabel Foundation
Mirabel provides a variety of services to children, young people and their extended family carers caring for children as a result of parental drug abuse. These include:
- referral to specialist services
- support groups for carers and for children
- youth ambassadors group for teenagers

(03) 9527 9422 or www.mirabelfoundation.org.au

“When the children arrive” is an excellent resource for carers.
Grandparents Victoria
14 Youlden Street, Kensington Vic 3031
Email: director@grandparents.com.au

Kindergarten Parents Victoria (KPV)
Level 3, 145 Smith Street, Fitzroy Vic 3065
(P.O. Box 1246) Collingwood Vic 3066
KPV provides a wide range of resources for members and non-members. Visit their website on www.kpv.org.au and click on the images to find information about the various resources on offer. Transition to school 2008 and Welcome to kindergarten 2008 may be particularly helpful.

Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages
For enquiries about birth certificates and death or marriage certificates.
1300 369 367

Relationships Australia
03 5175 9500
1300 639 630

Grandparent Advisors – providing support for grandparents caring for children

Grandparent Advisors have been introduced in selected Centrelink Customer Service Centres to support these grandparents by helping them access a range of payments and services they may be eligible for. These include:

- Family Tax Benefit, which assists with the costs of raising children
- Child Care Benefits, which assists with the costs of child care
- Parenting Payment, which assists with caring for a dependent child under the age of 16 (if you are not already receiving another income support payment), and
- Health Care Cards in the name of your grandchildren to assist with the cost of prescriptions.

How can a Grandparent Advisor assist you?
Grandparent Advisors can assist you by:

- providing an assessment of your family circumstances
- providing information and help to access Centrelink payments and services you may be eligible for
- arranging appointments for you with specialist Centrelink staff such as Social Workers, and
- arranging referrals to other federal, state and community service providers that may also be able to assist you

How can you contact a Grandparent Advisor?
A Grandparent Advisor can be contacted by calling Freecall™ 1800 245 965.
Grandparents can also obtain assistance by calling the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150, visiting www.familyassist.gov.au or by visiting the Family Assistance Office located in Medicare Offices and Centrelink Customer Service Centres.
Child PROTECTION should be contacted where you have significant concerns for a child’s safety or wellbeing. Phone the nearest regional number.

For Child Protection after hours, phone 131278.

Department of Human Services Regional Offices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DHS REGION</th>
<th>LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA</th>
<th>CHILD FIRST OR FAMILY SERVICES REFERRAL NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Metropolitan</td>
<td>1300 360 452</td>
<td>Gippsland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5177 2500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Eastern</td>
<td>1300 555 526</td>
<td>Grampians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5333 6669</td>
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<tr>
<td>North &amp; West</td>
<td>1300 360 408</td>
<td>Hume</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td></td>
<td>5722 0555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barwon-South Wester</td>
<td>5226 4540</td>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
</tr>
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<td>5434 5555</td>
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</table>

**Child FIRST: Child & Family Information, Referral & Support Teams**

There are 24 Child FIRST sites established in sub regional catchments across the state. These ‘hubs’ provide a central, community-based referral point to a range of community based Family Services and other supports. Child FIRST ensures that vulnerable children, young people and their families are linked effectively into relevant services and may be the best way of connecting children, young people and their families to the services they need.

Factors which affect a child’s safety, stability or development are:
- significant parenting problems that may be affecting the child’s development
- serious family conflict, including family breakdown
- families under pressure due to a family member’s physical or mental illness, substance abuse, disability or bereavement
- young, isolated and/or unsupported families
- significant social or economic disadvantage that may adversely impact on a child’s care or development.

The table below will assist you in finding your local Child FIRST referral number. It will show you the Local Government area you are in and the DHS region you are in. In some areas referrals about Aboriginal children and families can be made directly to an Aboriginal organisation, as indicated in italics in the table.
# Kinship Care Support Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE PROVIDER</th>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>PHONE NUMBER</th>
<th>DHS REGION</th>
<th>LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE AREA</th>
<th>SUB-REGIONAL SERVICE AREA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bethany Community Support Inc</td>
<td>16 Ballarat Road HAMLYN HEIGHTS 3215</td>
<td>5278 8122</td>
<td>Barwon South Western</td>
<td>Colac-Otway, Corangamite, Greater Geelong, Queenscliff, Surf Coast</td>
<td>Barwon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brophy Family and Youth Services Inc.</td>
<td>210 Timor Street WARRNAMBOOL 3280</td>
<td>5278 8122</td>
<td>Barwon South Western</td>
<td>City of Warrnambool, Glenelg, Moyne, Southern Grampians</td>
<td>South West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchor Inc.</td>
<td>Knox City Centre Shop 3036, Ozone Complex 425 Burwood Highway WANTIRNA SOUTH 3152</td>
<td>9801 1999</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>Knox, Maroondah, Yarra Ranges</td>
<td>Outer East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglicare Victoria</td>
<td>7-11 Shpley Road, BOX HILL 3128</td>
<td>9896 6322</td>
<td>Eastern Metropolitan</td>
<td>Boroodarda, Manningham, Monash, Whitehorse</td>
<td>Inner East</td>
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<tr>
<td>Berry Street</td>
<td>37 Elgin Street, MORWELL 3840</td>
<td>1300 010 838</td>
<td>Gippsland</td>
<td>Baw Baw, East Gippsland Latrobe, South Coast Wellington</td>
<td>Central, Southern and East</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child and Family Services Ballarat</td>
<td>115 Lydiard Street BALLARAT 3350</td>
<td>5337 3333</td>
<td>Grampians</td>
<td>Ararat, Ballarat, Golden Plains, Hepburn, Moorabool, Pyrenees</td>
<td>Central Highlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wimmera Uniting Church</td>
<td>185 Ballie Street, Horsham 3400</td>
<td>5382 6789</td>
<td>Grampians</td>
<td>Hindmarsh, Horsham, Northern Grampians West Wimmera, Yanballa</td>
<td>Wimmera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berry Street</td>
<td>110 Wyndham Street, SHEPPARTON 3630</td>
<td>5822 8100</td>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
<td>Greater Shepparton, Mitchell, Moira, Murrindindi, Strathbogie</td>
<td>West Gippsland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Murray Family Care</td>
<td>29 Stanley Street, WODONGA 3690</td>
<td>(02) 6055 8000</td>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
<td>Alpine, Benalla, Indigo, Mansfield, Towong Wangaratta, Wodonga</td>
<td>East Hume</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centacare</td>
<td>129 Langtree Avenue, MILDURA 3500</td>
<td>5022 0470</td>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
<td>Buloke, Gannawarre, Mildura, Swan Hill</td>
<td>Mallee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Luke’s Anglicare</td>
<td>175 Hargreaves Street, BENDIGO 3550</td>
<td>5440 1100</td>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
<td>Campaspe, Central Goldfield Greater Bendigo, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mt Alexander</td>
<td>Loddon Campaspe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anglicare Victoria</td>
<td>41 Somerville, YARRAVILLE 3013</td>
<td>9396 7400</td>
<td>North &amp; West Metropolitan</td>
<td>Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moonee Valley, Wyndham</td>
<td>Western</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptcare</td>
<td>25 Norwood Crescent, MOONEE PONDS 3039</td>
<td>9373 3800</td>
<td>North &amp; West Metropolitan</td>
<td>Brimbank, Melton</td>
<td>Brimbank Melton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kildonan</td>
<td>648 High Street, RESERVOIR 3073</td>
<td>9471 0108</td>
<td>North &amp; West Metropolitan</td>
<td>Banyule, Darebin, Nillumbik, Whittlesea, Yarra</td>
<td>North East</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orana Family Services</td>
<td>8 Papworth Place, MEADOW HEIGHTS 3048</td>
<td>9302 2700</td>
<td>North &amp; West Metropolitan</td>
<td>Hume, Moreland</td>
<td>Hume/Moreland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oz Child</td>
<td>Dandenong Central, Level 1/47 Princes Hwy, DANDENONG 3175</td>
<td>9212 5600</td>
<td>Southern Metropolitan</td>
<td>Bayside, Frankston, Kingston, Glen Eira, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip, Stonnington</td>
<td>Frankston, Mornington Peninsula and Inner Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesley Mission Victoria</td>
<td>280 Thomas Street DANDENONG 3175</td>
<td>9794 3000</td>
<td>Southern Metropolitan</td>
<td>Cardinia, Casey, Greater Dandenong</td>
<td>Outer South</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

# Aboriginal Kinship Care Service Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE PROVIDER</th>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>PHONE NUMBER</th>
<th>DHS REGION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative</td>
<td>5 Market Street, BALLARAT 3353</td>
<td>5331 5344</td>
<td>Grampians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bendigo District Aboriginal Co-operative</td>
<td>13-15 Forest Street, BENDIGO 3550</td>
<td>5442 4947</td>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative</td>
<td>37-53 Dalmahoy Street, BAIRNSDALE 3875</td>
<td>5150 0700</td>
<td>Gippsland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildura Aboriginal Corporation</td>
<td>120 Madden Ave, MILDURA 3500</td>
<td>5022 1852</td>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative</td>
<td>87 Latjoe Road, ROBINVALE 3549</td>
<td>5026 3353</td>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Njernda Aboriginal Cooperative</td>
<td>84 Hare Street, ECHUCA 3564</td>
<td>5482 3075</td>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative</td>
<td>170 Knight Street, SHEPPARTON 3630</td>
<td>5831 2010</td>
<td>Hume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan Hill Aboriginal Health Service</td>
<td>70 Nyah Road, SWAN HILL 3585</td>
<td>5032 2388</td>
<td>Loddon Mallee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency</td>
<td>139 Nicholson Street, EAST BRUNSWICK 3057</td>
<td>8388 1855</td>
<td>North and West Metropolitan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative</td>
<td>Lot 62 Morgan Street, NORTH GEELONG 3215</td>
<td>5277 0044</td>
<td>Barwon South Western</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation</td>
<td>21 Scott Street, HEYWOOD 3304</td>
<td>5527 2051</td>
<td>Barwon South Western</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Canberra Mothercraft Society (2006) Grandparents Parenting Grandchildren because of alcohol and other drugs, Canberra ACT.


Downie, J, Hay, D, Hislop, A & Horner B, (2004) The Perceived Experiences of Children and Adolescents living with their Grandparents: “Why living with my Grandparents is so...good”, Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia


Proper care when you’re not there (Information and advice about selecting babysitters to care for children)

Information for Parents: Things to look at when selecting child safe activities or services for your child

Wise Choices: Safe Children DVD (with factsheet, to help parents or other family members when choosing services or carers for their children)