

# Facilitator Guides for Grandparents Discussion Groups

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## An Overview on Facilitation

- *How to use discussion sheets as a tool for conducting “grandfamily” group meetings.*
- *Suggestions for planning, conducting and completing successful group discussions.*

“GRANDFAMILY” discussion groups bring caregivers’ together to discuss issues that are meaningful, productive and reduce a grandfamilies feeling of isolation. Group members learn from and share with one another their common concerns. Trained volunteer facilitators lead participants in structured, confidential discussions on issues that affect grandfamilies. Discussion group members also find fellowship with other grandfamilies and feel better able to face the challenges of caregiving.

Many communities see the need and have local people who are willing to lead a discussion group if they have help, support and guidance to lead effective group discussions. We, the University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension provide initial and ongoing training so that volunteers can facilitate grandfamily discussion groups in their own community. These discussion guides were written because of requests for additional resources to help volunteers conduct community discussion groups using simple yet educational guidelines. We owe a debt of gratitude to Kinship Kare of Northern Arizona grandfamily members who initially identified the topics for these discussion guides. We are also grateful to our volunteer facilitators who piloted and continue to

use these discussion guides in their grandfamily discussion groups throughout Northern Arizona.

After the initial facilitator training, some volunteers conduct their groups by focusing on issues that members suggest at discussion group meetings; other facilitators prefer suggested topics and materials that are easy to use, focus on relevant issues and provide an educational discussion. Therefore, we wrote, with the help of grandfamilies, volunteers and staff, discussion topics (17 current) included in this packet. The topics are gathered from listening and evaluating common issues grandfamilies face about raising children. The themes of the discussion topics include legal issues, relationship issues, effective discipline, and gaining support from schools, accessing social services, and recordkeeping. Group discussions will be most beneficial to members when they choose from the list, topics that are most interesting to the majority of members.

These guides are intended to spark discussion and give the facilitator references to reliable sources of information and background about grandfamily issues. The sources for these materials include research and parenting materials as well as practical recommendations gathered from discussion groups. Our experience (KKONA) with grandfamily discussion groups suggests that conducting a group discussion on for example, “Helping Substance Abusers Get Better”, can be an effective follow-up, after grandparents have attended a workshop or training on “substance abuse” because it allows grandfamilies to more deeply explore issues and gather grandfamily ideas.

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## The Format For Discussion Topics Guides

Each topic is presented on one page and has an accompanying feedback sheet that we encourage volunteer facilitators to complete and mail back to their grandfamily coordinator.

How and why the guides are organized is presented below:

**A. Why This Issue Is Important:** This section presents research findings or other evidence of the issue’s impact to all members of a grandfamily; children, caregivers and sometimes absent parents and other relatives.

**B. When This Issue Arises:** This section gives either an age range or the family developmental stage when the issue is likely to occur.

### C. Ten Or More Things A Grandfamily Caregiver Can

**Do:** This section lists simple and realistic actions a caregiver can take to respond to the issue. The actions are bolded (for easy identification) and we recommend writing the ten ideas on newsprint and posting them for group discussion. In some cases more information is given [an explanation or background information to help you, the facilitator conduct the discussion]. To facilitate this portion of the discussion we suggest gathering other ideas from the discussion group participants. Ask them which suggestions they are most likely to use; what action most interests them and/or what idea they would add to the list.

**D. Sources:** This is a listing of research articles and other scholarly references used to present the topic. Sources are also listed at the end of the packet.

**Recommended Reading And Other Resources:** A limited listing of recommended resources is included with the package of facilitation materials. For more information on reliable and researched grandfamily resources includes: Generations United web site at <http://www.gu.org> and Just in Time Parenting at [www.extension.org/parenting](http://www.extension.org/parenting). The resources listed are not intended

to be a complete listing of background information to conduct discussion groups. Facilitators should add their own resources or favorite books and ask grandfamily caregivers for their favorite materials or ask your sponsoring organization staff for their resources. Some grandfamily discussion groups create their own lending library.

## Some Recommendations To Start, Conduct, Complete And Plan For Your Discussion Groups

**Step 1** – Introduce an activity while waiting for people to arrive. The purpose of planning an activity is to get newcomers and repeat participants comfortable before the “formal” start of the meeting. A warm-up activity sets a comfortable tone for the group. An example of an activity is, “*Find someone who chose the same refreshment (water, soda, tea, coffee) that you did. Find out what made you both choose that drink.*”

**Step 2** - Ask each person to share a small success or accomplishment since you last met. If this is the first time the group has met, ask for a success they have recently had and give your own example. The purpose of this is to set a positive rather than a negative tone and steer the discussion in a more productive direction.

### *(For ongoing groups)*

**Step 3** - Reflect on the last discussion session. Ask, “*Was there anything that you carried away from the last time we met?*” The purpose of this question is to gauge if there is any follow-up needed or unfinished issues. Write the unresolved issue(s) on newsprint. Tell the group that if there is time after completing the discussion topic, then the group can tackle discussing another issue from the list. If there is no time left at the end of the meeting, tell the group that the unresolved issue(s) can be the focus of the next discussion group meeting.

**Step 4** - Present the discussion topic. The benefit of using a pre-selected topic is so you can guide the conversation using an issue that is important to grandfamily caregivers and that they want to discuss. You can either choose a topic you feel may address members’ needs and experiences, or you can ask your group to decide which issues they want to discuss. If topics are chosen with the groups input and agreement, it will be easier, to keep the conversation focused on the needs of the whole group rather than a few members who might have narrower discussion needs.

Write the “ten or more things” in advance on newsprint so that suggestions can be discussed point-by point. Ask

the caregivers to either identify what ideas from the list of ten “stand out” for them and/or what advice they might add to the list. Allow approximately thirty to forty-five minutes for this portion of the meeting.

### *(To begin closing the discussion)*

**Step 5** – Make announcements. Report on upcoming events and ask members for events, accomplishments, etc., that they want to share.

**Step 6** – Conduct a wrap-up activity or simple evaluation to close the discussion.

Ask the group to fill in the blank on this question, “*The idea or thought I am taking away from this discussion is...*” You might also consider wrap-up activities such as reading a poem or something humorous about raising grandchildren. The purpose is for you to gauge the meaningfulness of the discussion and to send people away with a positive and action inspiring thought.

### *(After the discussion group is over)*

## Reflecting On The Discussion Afterwards:

When thinking about upcoming meetings with your grandfamily discussion group it may be helpful to have a conversation with your co-facilitator on the most recent discussion or talk to the sponsoring university or agency that trains discussion group facilitators. Use these questions to explore the effectiveness of the discussion group with your co-facilitator:

- Where did the discussion move ahead?
- Where did the discussion get stuck?
- What does hearing the session’s discussion and members’ stories make you consider for the next meeting?

## Topics For Discussion Groups

The term “**grandfamilies**” refers to families where the grandparent(s) or other relative(s) is raising a child and may or may not have legal guardianship to the child who is related by blood, marriage or adoption.

### Topics That Affect You, The Adult Caregiver(S)

- Adjusting to “grandfamily” roles
- Dealing with changing friendships
- Interacting with legal systems
- Record keeping

- Navigating social service agencies
- Thinking about changing your role as the caregiver
- Planning for the future

### Topics That Influence Your Relationship With The Child's Parent (S)

- Changing family relationships
- Handling substance abusers
- Maintaining healthy contact when a parent stays in the caregiver's home

### Topics To Help With The Child

- Strengthening relationships with children, developing attachment
- Disciplining a "hurt" child
- Preparing a child for a parent's visit
- Managing sleep and nighttime issues
- Understanding and responding to a child's anger
- Sharing information with children
- Helping children be successful in school

## Reference list overall. Discussion Sheets

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This information has been reviewed by University faculty.  
[cals.arizona.edu/pubs/family/az1488.pdf](http://cals.arizona.edu/pubs/family/az1488.pdf)

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