

Readjusting to Parenthood: Peer Support Groups for Grandparents Assuming Care for Orphaned Children

VIDEO SUMMARY

When parents pass away, grandparents often assume the role of caregivers. Being thrust back into parenthood during a time of immense grief, and with a two-generation gap to bridge, introduces a range of challenges grandparents must overcome.


This video looks at the learning of practitioners from ASN Upendo Village in Kenya in supporting grandparents caring for grandchildren after their own children have passed away from HIV/AIDS. Sister Florence and Brigid share some of the


most common challenges these grandparents face, including parenting across generation gaps, and why peer support is so crucial to enabling grandparents to navigate re-entry into parenting. They describe the process they employ to support families in the aftermath of the loss of a parent to HIV/AIDS, to identify the most appropriate kinship caregiver for any children left behind. In addition, they explain why, in their experience, grandparents are often best positioned to assume the role of caregivers and what factors they consider in making the determination of suitability.


DISCUSSION TOPIC

In this video, Sister Florence describes the psychological stress often faced by grandparents when first becoming kinship carers. She describes the compound effect of stress arising from the grief of losing their own child, the uncertainty regarding the future of their grandchildren, dealing with the grief and emotions of the children now in their care, in addition to meeting their needs, and the stress of readjusting to parenthood. As well as other more practical forms of support, Sister Florence emphasizes the importance of providing emotional and psychological support to grandparents to help them begin to unpack their own emotions, process their grief, and mentally prepare for this new phase of parenting. Without such support, Sister Florence explains that grandparents face the risk of experiencing serious mental health challenges, including depression.

In your context:

-  Discuss the situations that often lead to the placement of children in kinship care, and which extended family members typically become kinship carers in these situations and why. Identify and discuss the sources of psychological and emotional stress that these kinship caregivers typically face in these situations, and the impact on the caregivers and children.


-  In what way does your organization, and/or your partners, currently provide support to kinship caregivers, to mitigate and help them to manage emotional and psychological stress? In what ways does this support improve the quality of caregiving, and conversely what are the risks of not providing sufficient emotional and psychological support? Discuss both positive and negative examples.


-  Discuss ideas and ways you could improve practices around providing kinship carers with emotional and psychological support, considering the learning from this video. What practical steps could you take within your own work, team, or organization towards improving these practices?


 DISCUSSION TOPIC

Sister Florence identifies a range of reasons why grandparents are often the best candidates for becoming kinship carers in the aftermath of the loss of a parent to HIV/AIDs. She describes how grandparents typically have more stable living arrangements, have strong existing bonds with their grandchildren, and carry the wisdom of age and deep knowledge of cultural traditions, which can be valuably imparted into children. These are the benefits of tapping into an older generation in parenting, however the generation gap also creates a range of challenges. Grandparents, who re-enter the parenting phase, naturally seek to employ the same parenting practices they used to raise their own children. However, they often do so without considering the changes to society, values, and ways of thinking that have taken place in the meantime. Also, grandparents have little experience with social media, or understanding of the significant influence it has on this generation of children, in terms of their worldview and self-formation. As Sister Florence explains, this creates a need to 'bring the two generations together' to promote understanding and reduce the likelihood of tension, stress, and conflict in the placement. Brigid explains that one of the primary ways Upendo Village does this, is through peer support groups, which create space for grandparents to process, reflect and share their experiences and encourage and counsel each other. She describes how Upendo Village make these groups accessible, and how important it is for facilitators to interact with the grandparents in ways that make them feel understood, supported, and comfortable to share. Sister Florence also describes how they also provide additional counselling for grandparents caring for adolescent children, as this is an age when conflict and misunderstanding is likely to escalate.

In your context:

-  Discuss some of the practical challenges for grandparents providing kinship care for grandchild, that arise due to the generation gap. What kinds of issues and tensions have you seen this result in, considering the perspective of both the children in care and their grandparents as caregivers? What impacts does this have on the quality of care provided to children?

-  How (if at all) does your organization currently address these challenges? Considering both strengths and gaps, reflect on the effectiveness of current approaches, drawing upon examples and cases you are familiar with. Brainstorm additional ways you could support grandparents in bridging the generation gap to address any identified gaps in practice and to improve effectiveness.

-  Discuss the relevance and role of peer support groups for kinship carers in your context. If these are already in place, discuss ideas to strengthen practice around the facilitation of peer support groups, reflecting on both Sister Florence and Brigid's learning. If these aren't in place, discuss whether they would be seen as a valuable support mechanism by kinship carers in your context, and if so, what practical next steps you/ your organization could take to explore the feasibility of establishing peer support groups.