

New Support Group Now Available For Grandparents Parenting Grandchildren

by Randy Schorfheide

August 16 2023 11:56 AM



ALTON – Current U.S. census data shows that 7.1 million American grandparents are living with their grandchildren under 18. An estimated 2.3 million of those grandparents are responsible for their grandchildren. Roughly a third of grandchildren living with grandparents who are responsible for them are younger than 6.

About half of the grandparents who are responsible for their grandchildren are 60 and over, according to census data. So, what do these 7.1 million American grandparents have in common: the unexpected role of becoming a child caregiver long after they thought those years were behind them.

They depict a social trend in America: the high number of “grandfamilies” — grandparents raising grandchildren. And that specific social trend exists right here in the Riverbend region.

OSF Saint Anthony’s Health Center is introducing its Grandparents Support Group because there are extra challenges for people who are navigating these dual roles. Participants will learn more about how to manage and support their families and themselves.

The Grandparents Support Group will meet every Friday from 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. starting on Friday, September 15.

As a child therapist, Dr. Jill C. Schreiber, LCSW, PhD, psychotherapist, OSF Saint Anthony’s Health Center, would regularly be working with grandparents who were the primary caregiver for their grandchild: either formally, as foster parents or informally. “Sometimes the grandparents were co-parenting with their son or daughter. I see the additional challenges that this provides,” Dr. Schreiber says. “It can be difficult to navigate the relationships when there are multiple roles.”

Among some of the most common circumstances fueling the creation of grandfamilies include:

- Parental substance abuse
- Parental incarceration
- Death of a parent

Additionally, adding more fuel to this social trend are two crises that have forced a spike in recent years. COVID is one - where at least 140,000 children were orphaned by the

pandemic and are now living with grandparents or next of kin. The other crisis is the opioid epidemic. America's opioid problem has greatly increased the pressure on grandparents to take over responsibility for children.

According to Dr. Schreiber, there are multiple reasons that children are not parented by their biological parents. "Parents may be struggling with mental health or substance use, they may have health issues or be in the military. Sometimes great grandparents or great aunts and uncles are in the primary caregiving role," she says.

Since most grandparents do not plan for child caregiving, financial stress often arises. According to Generations United, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that was launched more than 35 years ago in partnership with AARP that advocates for grandfamilies, about 18 percent of grandparents responsible for their grandchildren live in poverty. A quarter of those grandparents have disabilities.

Grandparents may struggle with finances, health issues, or challenges with cultural changes, Dr. Schreiber states, "Grandparents also need to learn to navigate online school expectations and how to monitor internet usage. Grandparents also are missing a network of others who are trying to navigate parenting. Parents typically have friends who are parenting whereas grandparents or other caregivers may feel isolated or unique. This is why a group where they can find and talk to others is so important. "

For more information on the hospital's new Grandparents Support Group, please call the Psychological Services Counseling Program at (618) 474-6240 or via email at Staci.M.Knox@osfhealthcare.org.

###

About OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony's Health Center: A 49-bed Rural Health designated acute care hospital in Alton, Illinois, [OSF Saint Anthony's](#) serves the residents of Madison, Jersey and Macoupin counties. It is home to OSF Moeller Cancer Center, which provides the latest diagnostic tools and treatment for patients in a relaxing environment. OSF Saint Anthony's also provides 24-hour access to a physician-staffed emergency department, in addition to cardiovascular, neurology, pulmonology, surgical, rehabilitation services and more. OSF Saint Anthony's is fully accredited by the Joint Commission for Healthcare Facilities, American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer, American College of Radiology, CMS 4-Star Rating, American Heart Association, IDPH and TJC Primary Stroke Center. OSF Saint Anthony's is part of OSF HealthCare – an integrated health system with 15 hospitals in Illinois and Michigan and robust Innovation and Digital Health divisions that provide access to specialty care and remote monitoring, helping people receive the care they need close to home. [OSF HealthCare](#) is operated by The Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis.

