

## The Many Emotions of Kinship Care

For a lot of kinship parents, the decision to change hats from being a grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, or sibling to being in a caregiver or parent role literally happened over night – or at least with little or no warning. So many significant and abrupt changes in such a short amount of time can stir up a wide array of emotions, leaving you overwhelmed and exhausted.

Do any of these seem familiar?

- Anger towards or disappointment in the parents of the relative child now in your care
- Guilt or embarrassment or thoughts like, “how could this happen to my family?”
- Empathy for the child’s parent(s) and what they are feeling
- Divided loyalty to the parent (your relative) and the child
- Difficulty letting go of your former role as grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling, etc.
- Resentment towards the biological parent(s) or even the child
- Regret for your decision to step in and

become the primary caregiver

- Relief that the child is now safe and being well cared for

It is important for you to know that, if you are thinking or feeling or experiencing any of these things – or even the myriad other emotions we

have not listed out – this is completely normal and you’re definitely not alone. Caring for someone else also means caring for yourself and finding ways to avoid letting all of these emotions eat you up inside, turn your life upside down, or leave you feeling more estranged from other members of your family. Below are a few suggestions to get you started:



- Surround yourself with as many positive and supportive

friends, family, and community members you know.

- Find solace in your place of worship, religion, or other spiritual beliefs that you may have.
- Be flexible and allow yourself to be vulnerable;

*Continued on page 4*

## Managing Holiday Dynamics with Kin

Holidays conjure up images of happy family gatherings and meaningful traditions. Under all the sparkle, yummy treats, and special songs, *family* is at the heart of what makes the holidays memorable. Naturally we want the children in our care to take away from the holidays those warm, special family feelings. We also understand that this can be a difficult time for kids who are not living with their parents. If you're caring for relatives' children, then the kids in your home may be more able to maintain family connections over the holidays. However, kids still acutely feel the separation, and will be especially vulnerable this time of year. As a relative caregiver, you'll want to be aware of all that the holiday season can dish up, whether sweet or a bit bitter.

### Holiday traditions

An obvious benefit to kin you're caring for is they may get to experience all the usual family traditions and holiday rituals they've always enjoyed. This would be especially true if you've always spent holiday time with the birth parents of the children in your care. Think of all that is at the root of holiday traditions: the food, gift-giving customs, dress, decorations, and music. The child in your home may



continue to be at the heart of all these family traditions if you and the birth parents are visiting together at the holidays. At the same time, your new role as primary parent may mean it's time to create some new rituals which speak to the unique and special family that you all have become. This may be especially true if the current circumstances do not support spending time with the child's birth parent(s) over the holidays. Even so, perhaps there are some special customs or traditions that the child and his parent(s) do every year that you could incorporate into your celebrations. This may go a long way in keeping the spirit alive for the children in your care. Other family members or family friends may have other ideas or suggestions to make the holiday special.

### Share the love

In some cases, you may be dividing up family time. The child currently in your care might spend Christmas Eve with you and your immediate family members and then share Christmas Day with her biological parents, for example. Or, perhaps the child's birth parent(s) have never celebrated a particular holiday with you in the past. Now, given the circumstances, might it be appropriate to extend an invitation and include them in your plans? Try to remember that emotions tend to run high at this time of year and do your best to approach scheduling time with all members of the family with an extra measure of patience.

### Gift Giving

Be planful about gift giving now that family structure has changed. Budgets, time, and number of gifts are all things to consider. Gifts can also be used as emotional leverage, with some implying that loyalty is what's expected in return for gifts. Moreover, feelings of guilt or sympathy may tempt some family members to overdo gift giving. Something as

*Continued on page 3*

## *Managing Holiday Dynamics, continued from page 2*

simple as encouraging the child to remember his or her birth parents at the holiday – by making or giving a gift, creating or selecting a special card, or making a craft project at school for them – can go a long way. As far as extended family members go, communicate about a plan ahead of time. Have family members draw names, have a dollar limit, or stick to simple crafts. The kids in your care may enjoy making gifts for family members, and these may be more meaningful than store bought trinkets. Sites like <http://www.parents.com/fun/arts-crafts/kid/> or [www.busybeekidscrafts.com](http://www.busybeekidscrafts.com) are just two possibilities.

### **Communicate well**

Amidst the hustle and bustle of the holidays, it might be a good idea to pause and consider the complex emotions riding high in the children you care for. They will be acutely aware they are not with their birth family at a time when family is the focus. Behavior challenges and strong feelings may accompany all the good attempts you make to create special holiday memories. Do lots of listening and discussing with the children about what they're experiencing throughout the holidays.

On a practical level, plan dates of family get-togethers and other activities well ahead of time. There are more people than ever to consider when laying out your calendar. Communicating and discussing all the logistics will go a long way towards easing tensions. Include in these conversations any potentially difficult situations, such as possible co-parenting challenges, or helping to get everyone on the same page about who will or won't be invited to a gathering and the reasons for those decisions. While these conversations will not likely be easy, getting the issues out in the open may help resolve some conflicts before everyone is sitting around the holiday table.

When you are all together, keep conversations and comments about the child's birth parents restricted to those that are kind or positive. The topic may be something of the elephant in the room, but kids are always listening and may be paying attention more closely than you know at the time.

### **Be kind to yourself**

Acknowledge and accept your own mixed feelings about the holidays now that things have changed significantly for your own family. While you may be feeling relieved for the kids in your care, feeling that they are safe and sound this holiday, you may also be experiencing anger toward the parents for their part in the change, as well as resentment that your holidays are now quite different than they've been in the past. Get support if you need it in working through these complex times. Reach out to those you trust or utilize professional services if needed.

Remember the children in your care are already carrying around extra emotional baggage, simply by living in a different home. Being thoughtful about the unique qualities of caring for kin will help all of you create lasting, meaningful holiday experiences.



Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center (FCARC)  
Info@wifostercareandadoption.org  
800-947-8074  
6682 W. Greenfield Ave., Suite 310  
Milwaukee, WI 53214  
© 2016



don't be afraid to share and make connections with others who have similar shared life experiences.

- Acknowledge that people make mistakes and that mistakes are part of growing and learning.
- Even when it might seem impossible, do your best to practice forgiveness – for yourself and others.

As difficult and overwhelming as everything might be for you, be mindful that you are not the only family member impacted by this change. Everyone involved, from you and the child, to the biological parents and your extended family members, are feeling grief and loss and a range of raw emotions that may be manifesting in many different ways. Recognizing and acknowledging that everyone may be experiencing new emotions may be a way to not only validate your own feelings, but also connect with other family members.

By stepping forward to care for your relative's child, you are also, in a sense, committing to working through all of these many emotions – both good and bad – for the benefit and wellbeing of the child. But it's not a commitment that you have to fulfill alone. As with all types of parenting and caregiving, there will be good days and not so good days; days when everything runs smoothly and days when it seems every moment is a struggle. We encourage you to seek out support and ways to refill your spirits – doing so can help you grow in confidence and enhance your caregiving skills to help the children in your care thrive.

*When you need a little extra encouragement or support, please know that the Resource Team at the Coalition is here for you. We can provide resources, referrals, or even just an understanding person to speak with.*

### **Tip Sheets**

[wifostercareandadoption.org/reading-room/tip-sheets](http://wifostercareandadoption.org/reading-room/tip-sheets)

- Celebrating the Holidays with the Children You Foster

### **Books**

- *The Kinship Parenting Toolbox*, edited by Kim Phagan Hansel

### **Additional Information**

- [Helping Young People in Foster Care through the Holidays](#)
- [Celebrating Holidays with Children You Foster](#)
- [Before You Celebrate the Holidays with Your Foster Children](#)
- [The Holidays and Foster Children](#)
- [Managing the Holidays](#)
- [Holidays with Extended Family](#)
- [May Your Days be Merry and Bright](#)
- [40+ Multicultural Children's Books about Grandparents](#)



Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center (FCARC)  
Info@wifostercareandadoption.org  
800-947-8074  
6682 W. Greenfield Ave., Suite 310  
Milwaukee, WI 53214  
© 2016



# Adoption and Guardianship Enhanced Support Program

The National Quality Improvement Center – Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation (QIC-AG) Project recognizes that families formed through adoption and guardianship have unique challenges and needs. That is why QIC-AG is developing and implementing the Adoption and Guardianship Enhanced Support (AGES) Program. The program seeks to serve as an adoption and guardianship competent, trauma-informed support for families facing emerging needs post-permanence. AGES will offer families an individualized plan with specific goals, needed supports and targeted advocacy based on the assessment of the child and family’s needs and strengths. The following two-page overview details information about the target population, evaluation of the program, and expected outcomes.

## Overview

The National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation (QIC-AG) is a five-year project working with eight sites that will implement evidence-based interventions or develop and test promising practices which if proven effective can be replicated or adapted in other child welfare jurisdictions. Effective interventions are expected to achieve long-term, stable permanence in adoptive and guardianship homes for waiting children as well as children and families after adoption or guardianship has been finalized.

## Site Overview

The Wisconsin Department of Children and

Families (DCF) is the lead agency for the QIC-AG project in Wisconsin. With the exception of Milwaukee, Wisconsin has a state-supervised county administered child welfare system, with child welfare services delivered through a network that includes counties, private agencies, and tribal nations. Post-permanency services are delivered by Post Adoption Resource Centers throughout the state. The Wisconsin QIC-AG project will develop and implement the Adoption and Guardianship

Enhanced Support (AGES) program, providing post-permanency supports to adoptive parents and guardians.

## Project Goal

The overall goal of the QIC-AG Wisconsin project is to understand if families who participate in the AGES program are better able to manage family stress, to develop an increased capacity for post-permanence stability, and to achieve improved well-being. Through this project, the QIC-AG will determine whether the enhanced response to emerging needs of adoptive and guardianship families is effective in increasing the capacity of adoptive parents and guardians to address the needs of their children and equipping parents and guardians to better manage family stress. The project aims to serve all families who have adopted or assumed guardianship of children in the targeted region of the state (i.e., the 17 counties and three sovereign tribal nations in the Northeastern Region). This target population includes children adopted through the public child welfare system as well as children adopted through

*Continued on page 6*



## AGES Program, continued from page 5

tribal customary adoptions, private domestic adoptions, or international adoptions.

### **Permanency Continuum Interval:** **Indicated**

The QIC-AG Wisconsin project will implement the AGES program in the Indicated Interval of the QIC-AG Permanency Continuum Framework. Families in this interval reach out for help because of the emergence or escalation of challenging issues or behaviors. These emerging issues might be triggered by a change in family dynamics resulting from the child's age or developmental stage such as entering the teen years, a change in family functioning, or a parent's diminished commitment to permanence. Supports provided to families in this interval are designed to reduce family stress, stabilize the placement, and increase the family's skills in managing challenging behaviors.

### **Target Population**

The Wisconsin QIC-AG project is focusing on the 17 counties and three sovereign tribal nations in the Northeastern Region and targeting children who have a finalized adoption or guardianship and whose family has requested services from DCF, a Post Adoption Resource Center (PARC), or the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center (FCARC), or has requested an increase in subsidy rate because of increased child need.

### **Intervention**

The AGES intervention is being developed and tested by the Wisconsin QIC-AG team. AGES is based on similar programs serving post-adoption and guardianship families in [Pennsylvania](#) and [North Carolina](#). AGES is also informed by adoptive and guardianship families in Wisconsin who expressed that they would welcome help with the challenges they face parenting children who have histories of significant trauma and abuse. The AGES program recognizes that families formed through adoption and guardianship have unique challenges and needs

that require a family-specific individualized approach. In comparison with the current services provided by PARC and FCARC, AGES will offer families individualized assessment of emerging needs and their strengths, identification of family-specific goals, personalized assistance with navigation of pre-existing resources and services, and targeted advocacy in the areas as requested by the family. The AGES' team of professionals will work with families to build supportive relationships by offering personalized skill-building and educational materials.

### **Program Evaluation and Expected Results**

Wisconsin will participate in an evaluation specific to the AGES intervention. Since the AGES intervention is being developed as part of the QIC-AG initiative, the evaluation will focus on testing the components of the intervention, and the short-term outcomes listed below.

### **Short-term Outcomes**

Short-term outcomes, unique to this site include the following:

- ⇒ decreased familial stress
- ⇒ increased family satisfaction with services
- ⇒ increased caregiver confidence

## MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the QIC-AG visit [www.qic-ag.org](http://www.qic-ag.org) and

- » search our Intervention and Program Catalog
- » download information about the Permanency Continuum Framework
- » explore details about the eight Partner Sites

# QIC•AG



Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center (FCARC)  
Info@wifostercareandadoption.org  
800-947-8074  
6682 W. Greenfield Ave., Suite 310  
Milwaukee, WI 53214  
© 2016





**Wisconsin Foster and  
Adoptive Parent Association  
(WFAPA)**



WFAPA provides great opportunities to network with other foster and adoptive parents. They also have an extensive website, [wfapa.org](http://wfapa.org), a newsletter, and a network of supportive WFAPA members and other foster parents who can be a resource for you.

We are always here for additional information, resources, and support. You can contact us toll-free at **800-947-8074** or via email at **[info@wifostercareandadoption.org](mailto:info@wifostercareandadoption.org)**.

**Where to Find Us on Social Media**

[facebook.com/coalitionforcyf](https://facebook.com/coalitionforcyf)  
[twitter.com/coalitionforcyf](https://twitter.com/coalitionforcyf)  
[instagram.com/coalitionforcyf](https://instagram.com/coalitionforcyf)



Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center (FCARC)  
Info@wifostercareandadoption.org  
800-947-8074  
6682 W. Greenfield Ave., Suite 310  
Milwaukee, WI 53214  
© 2016

