

# GRG NEWSLETTER

## Chicken Soup for Caregivers

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The benefit of keeping grandchildren in the care of loving grandparents presents complexities for the entire family. The financial, physical, and mental changes cause stress in the caregiver's world.

The Brookdale Foundation sponsored a weekend conference in Denver on June 1-3 to help relatives raising grandchildren with the opportunities to discover solutions to the challenges of raising children in today's world.

A keynote speaker for the conference was LeAnn Thieman, L.P.N. and co-author of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series. During her speech, LeAnn shares life lessons on balancing schedules, setting priorities and taking care of *you*.

LeAnn tells us that the physical symptoms of stress include appetite changes, headaches, poor sleeping, digestive problems, foot tapping, and finger drumming. Mental stress indicators include poor concentration, dull senses, lethargy, bad dreams, crying spells, and nervous laughter. Symptoms of spiritual stress include emptiness, doubt, martyrdom, apathy, worry and the feeling that "no one cares".

LeeAnn encourages everyone to use stress in a positive way and prevent it from becoming "distress". She suggests adopting a humorous view towards life's situations. She believes that laughter and a good sense of humor can take the edge off everyday stressors. Not being too serious or in a constant alert mode helps maintain the level-headedness of mind and promotes clear thinking. Being able to laugh stress away is the smartest way to ward off its effects.

She suggests creating a quiet area that you can escape to for ten minutes a day. You cannot always run away, but you can "dream the impossible dream." A quiet country scene painted mentally, or on canvas, can take you out of the turmoil of a stressful situation. Change the scene by reading a good book or playing beautiful music to create a sense of peace and tranquility.

Share your stress. LeAnn suggests talking to a friend or family member about your concerns and worries. Perhaps a friend or family member can help you see your problem in a different light.

Make time for fun, schedule time for both work and recreation. Play can be just as important to your well-being as work; you need a break from your daily routine to just relax and have fun.

The best strategy for avoiding stress is to learn how to relax. Unfortunately, many people try to relax at the same pace that they lead the rest of their lives. Find activities that give you pleasure and that are good for your mental and physical well-being. Focus on relaxation, enjoyment, and health. Be good to yourself and **REMEMBER TO BREATHE.**

### **Montana Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Project**

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# Generations United

Generations United (GU) is a national organization that promotes awareness and support of grandfamilies. Their web-site contains extensive information on grandparents raising grandchildren across the nation, as well as links to support groups and other similar resources. Check it out at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org).

“All Children Deserve a Permanent Family” is a Generations United campaign designed to raise awareness about the need for subsidized guardianship to help children move out of foster care into safe and loving homes of grandparents and other relatives. Across the U.S. about 20,000 children are in foster care with relatives and are waiting for a normal childhood. For these kids a court has determined that they cannot be safely returned to their parents and adoption is not possible. But because they are in state custody, they have to get permission from authorities for ordinary childhood activities that most of us take for granted. A sleepover at a friend's house or going on a school field trip can turn into a bureaucratic nightmare. Federally supported guardianships could end these problems.

Through support provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts, GU is conducting awareness raising activities to educate media, policymakers, and the public on policy recommendations that provide the services and resources children in foster care with relatives need to reach successful adulthood. Special attention is given to the recommendation of The Pew Recommendation on Children in Foster Care to allow states to use federal Title IV-E federal foster care funding for subsidized guardianship programs for children in foster care. The Pew Charitable Trusts is also championing a broader campaign called Kids Are Waiting: Fix Foster Care Now. It is a national, non-partisan campaign dedicated to ensuring that all children in foster care have the safe, permanent families they deserve by reforming the federal financing structure that governs our nation's foster care program.

## **Subsidized Guardianship: Recommendation of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care**

To increase the likelihood that children will leave foster care for a permanent family, the Pew Commission recommended that the federal government and the states share the cost of subsidized guardianship, in those states that choose to provide such assistance. For the federal government, guardianship would become a Title IV-E reimbursable expense. This means states would be reimbursed for their guardianship expenditures at the same federal match rate as exists for foster care and adoption assistance. Like adoption assistance, guardianship assistance helps families support the needs of the children.

**The Pew Commission views subsidized guardianship as an additional route to permanence *for children in foster care*. It would therefore apply only under the following circumstances:**

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- \* When a child has been removed from his or her home and the state child welfare agency has responsibility for placement and care of the child;
- \* When a child has been under the care of the state agency for a given period of time, to be determined by the state;
- \* When a court has explicitly determined that neither reunification nor adoption are feasible permanence options for a particular child; and when a strong attachment exists between a child and a potential guardian who is committed to caring permanently for the child.

**There are many situations in which guardianship might be the best permanence option for a child, including:**

- \* A child is living with a relative (e.g., a grandparent) who is able to make a permanent commitment but does not want to disrupt existing family relationships.
- \* A family where termination of parental rights goes against a strongly held cultural norm, as in Native American cultures.
- \* An adolescent who, after a clear understanding of the options, does not wish to be adopted but desires a permanent connection with his relatives or a foster family.
- \* A situation where a parent's physical, emotional or cognitive disability prevents him or her from being an active, permanent caregiver but where termination of parental rights is undesired and unwarranted.

**Guardianship conveys the following parental rights to the child's caretaker:**

custody; responsibility for the protection, education, and care and control of the child; and decision-making responsibilities as the child's caretaker. Once guardianship is established, children are no longer in the custody of the state. For this reason, guardianship reduces government costs associated with agency oversight of foster care cases.

## Obtaining a Birth Certificate for your grandchild

The state of Montana will allow a relative caregiver to obtain a birth certificate for a child only if they have guardianship. If you have guardianship and need a copy of the child's birth certificate, call (406) 444-2685 to request an application. You will need to mail in notarized proof of guardianship and \$12.00. Delivery of the certificate takes two to three weeks.

## Bicycle Safety

Summer is finally here and the bicycle's can come out of storage for another season of fun. Here are a few safety tips to keep the children in your life safe while enjoying the great outdoors on their bicycles.

- \* Talk to children about bicycle safety and then follow up later with a refresher.
- \* Make sure they are wearing a certified bicycle helmet and that it fits well and is snug. Do not allow the child to say they have outgrown the need for their helmet. The highest rate of bicycle head injuries is for boys between the age of 10 and 14.
- \* When purchasing a bike, make sure the child is with you so you can see if the bike is the right size. Don't buy a bike thinking the child will grow into it. Accidents happen a lot more when children ride a bike that doesn't fit their body.
- \* Ride on the same side as traffic and follow the same rules as cars. For example, stop at stop signs, stop lights, etc.
- \* Tell children to avoid busy streets. Children under ten should be supervised when riding their bikes, because they do not understand traffic well yet.
- \* Don't rush children into riding a two-wheeled bicycle, wait until they are ready.
- \* Remind them to *stop* and look when entering an intersection or crossing a road.
- \* Remind them to make their own decisions and not just follow a friend without looking first themselves.

This is not an exhaustive list by any means. If you would like more information on bicycle safety, go to <http://www.ibike.org/education/safety-kids.htm>



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## Grandparent Contributions

If you would like to highlight something special your grandparents raising grandchildren support group is doing please send an article or information to [grg@montana.edu](mailto:grg@montana.edu) for possible submission in the newsletter. We would also love pictures and poetry. Please remember if you send in photos you need permission from all the people in the pictures. You can request a picture release form from the GRG project by e-mailing us at [grg@montana.edu](mailto:grg@montana.edu) or calling 406-994-3395.

# Legislative Update - Bills Passed!

Four grandparent bills passed this last session thanks to the hard work and effort of Montana Senator John Esp who sponsored the bills as well as the other representatives who sat on the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee.

The first, Senate Bill #27 clarifies the rights of grandparents to have contact with a grandchild. This bill may help those grandparents whose grandchildren are in state custody but would still like to visit their grandchildren, or those who are being prevented by parents from seeing their grandchildren. This bill can be located on-line at <http://www.hslda.org/Legislation/State/mt/2007/MTSB27/default.asp>

The second, Senate Bill #31 is described as “an act allowing continued custody of a child by the child’s caretaker relative following voluntary surrender of the child by a parent of the child under circumstances indicating abandonment; providing for an ex parte order by a district court; prohibiting a peace officer or court from requiring surrender of the child by the caretaker relative except in certain circumstances; providing immunity; and providing an applicability date.” If you are a grandparent without formal paperwork, this is an important bill to look up as it does provide some protection against parents showing up after extended periods and taking the children. This bill outlines the paperwork the relative caretaker needs to submit, so this is a great bill to actually look up and have on file if you are worried about a parents possible return.

This bill can be located on-line at <http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/2007/billhtml/SB0031.htm>

The third and fourth are Senate Bills #48 and #49 which provide a means for caretaker relatives to seek and approve medical care and enroll children in school. Senate Bill #48 is at <http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/2007/billpdf/SB0048.pdf>  
Senate Bill #49 is at <http://data.opi.mt.gov/bills/2007/billpdf/SB0049.pdf>

**All four of these bills require action on the part of the relative caregiver, so if you have need of these bills, be sure to look them up and follow the directions they provide to pursue an affidavit.**

**Keep in mind that these bills do not go into effect immediately.** (See the last section in each bill for more accurate time lines.) In fact, #27, #31, and #48 state that the act applies to a caretaker relative to whom a child is given by a parent after October 1, 2007, for care by the relative. (Or similar wording, depending on the bill.) Bill #49 applies on or after July 1st.

If for any reason the internet sites listed for the bills above do not work for you any of these bills can be accessed through the Montana legislature web-site. The page to look up a specific bill is [http://laws.leg.mt.gov/pls/laws07/law0203w\\$.startup](http://laws.leg.mt.gov/pls/laws07/law0203w$.startup)

# Building Family Strengths

Montana State University Extension service has many guides that provide information on a variety of topics. The following information was taken from the montguide "Building Family Strengths". If you would like a full copy of this publication it is available through the internet at [www.montana.edu/publications](http://www.montana.edu/publications) or by requesting a copy from your local county extension agent.

## Communication

Strong families communicate. They talk. They share themselves. They share their feelings, hopes, dreams, fears, joys, sorrows, experiences, growth and needs. They take the time to listen and respond to what others have to say. There are a number of things that can improve family communication.

**Take time to talk.** It is especially important to talk about feelings. You may decide to turn off the TV so the family can talk. Talk about feelings and experiences while driving in the car, while sharing household chores or before bedtime. You can encourage family members to share by saying "Tell me more;" "Wow. That must have been exciting (frightening, etc);" "What was the best part of the day for you?"

**You might try playing a talking game.** Write down on small pieces of paper questions about topics important to your family. Questions might range from "What age would you like to be and why?" and "What animal would you like to be?" to more serious questions like "Do you think it is ever all right to tell a lie?" Make the questions appropriate for the ages of the family members. Place the questions in a box and have each person draw out a sheet of paper and respond to the question.

**Speak effectively.** Be honest in your speaking. You don't have to be blunt. Instead, try to balance honest speech with tact and concern for another's feelings.

Use *I-messages* when sharing your thoughts and feelings. I-messages help you take responsibility for your thoughts and feelings. For example, instead of saying, *You're so rude to read the paper over dinner instead of talking to me*, it's better to say, *I feel hurt when you read the paper over dinner I would really like it if we took the time to talk together*. I-messages let you express your feelings without labeling others' behavior, criticizing unfairly or making wrong assumptions. A listener is less likely to get defensive about a message presented this way.

*We-messages* are appropriate when you want to express your thoughts and feelings about what is going on in the family. For example, children may argue over what to watch on television. A parent may say, *"The problem isn't that we can't agree about what to watch; the problem is that we're not being very considerate of one another."*

Be specific in your speaking. Avoid general statements like *You never help around the house*, or *You're always late for dinner*. *Never* and *always* statements are rarely true. Instead, try focusing on a specific issue and directing your comments on an action, not the person. For example, say, *I'm upset because you've been late for dinner three times this week, and the whole family had to wait for you*.

When your family has a problem, make suggestions that are kind and helpful. Try to suggest actions that you or others could take to improve the situation or solve the problem. If you criticize another person's actions without helping that person come up with an alternative, he or she may feel frustrated and helpless.

**Be a good listener.** Listening to others is one of the most powerful ways of showing love. To be good listeners we must set aside our lectures and really try to understand from the point of view of another person. The goal is simply to hear, understand and accept the other person's feelings and views.

It's important to listen beyond words. Pay attention to body talk. The eyes and the upper lip may give you clues about how a person is feeling. The eyes may be clear or red, dry or watery, wide open or partially closed. A quivering lip is a pretty good sign that the person is upset. If the lip is straight or slightly tight, the person is probably stressed.

As we strive to show understanding, there are some things we should avoid doing. For example, avoid giving advice ("What you need to do is ..."), talking about your own experiences instead of theirs ("That same thing happened to me") or making the person's pain seem unimportant (Everyone feels that way once in a while"). When people are hurting, they feel that no one can fully appreciate the pain they're in.

# Grandparent Support Groups Across Montana

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## **Billings**

Bernie Mason  
P.O. Box 35021  
Billings, MT 59107  
256-2828

## **Bozeman**

Fonda Porterfield  
316 A Herrick Hall  
Bozeman, MT 59715  
994-3395  
grg@montana.edu

## **Browning**

Carrie Jackson  
Eagle Shield Center  
P.O. Box 76  
Browning, MT 59417  
338-7257

## **Butte**

Butte 4C's  
Terri Bolstad  
101 E. Broadway  
Butte, MT 59701  
723-4019  
800-794-4061

## **Colstrip**

Jennifer Anderson  
P.O. Box 65  
Forsyth, MT 59327  
346-7320

## **Dillon**

723-4019  
800-794-4061

## **Glendive**

Pete Bruno  
Parents Resource Center  
200 S. Kendrick  
Glendive, MT 59330  
377-7515

## **Great Falls**

Gerri Laubunetz  
Healthy Mothers,  
Healthy Babies  
1100 6th Avenue South  
Great Falls, MT 59403  
268-6762  
Jona McNamee  
Cascade Extension  
454-6980

## **Helena**

Jeanette B. Mattfeldt  
562 Broadway  
Helena, MT 59601  
442-8207

## **Lewistown**

Denise Seilstadt  
712 W. Main  
Lewistown, MT 59457  
535-3919

## **Kalispell**

Melody Domphe  
The Nurturing Center, Inc.  
146 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. W.  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
756-1414

## **Missoula**

Barbara Cowen  
Families First  
721-7690

Kathy Revello, MSU Extension  
Missoula County Agent  
256-4208

## **Poplar and Wolf Point**

Ardis Oelkers  
MSU Extension  
Culbertson, MT 59218  
787-5312

## **Ravalli County**

Brenda Fisher  
Family Resource Specialist  
108 Pinckney  
Hamilton, MT 59840  
363-1961 ext:107

## **Rocky Boy Reservation/ Box Elder**

Peggy Riotar-Aquino  
395-4875

## **Rocky Boy Reservation/ Agency**

Evelyn Gopher  
395-4875

## **Townsend**

Nancy Marks 226-3710  
Jerri Paulk 266-4249

*It is very difficult to go back and make a brand new start. But you can always start from now and make a brand new ending.*

*- Vivek Jain*

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*There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.*

*- Albert Einstein*