

**Larsen, D. (1989, May 22). Becoming a Parent Again. [Social Issues Resources Series \(Family\)](#), 4, Article 10.**

## **OVERVIEW**

Boy: 'My Mother's never going to get well is she?'

Grandmother: 'No honey, she's not and we have to accept that.'

Boy: 'And my Father can't take me back either.'

Grandmother: 'No, not as long as he's with the other woman.'

Pause.

Boy: 'But I've got you, Grandma?' came the hopeful young voice.

Grandma: 'Yes, you do, honey.'

An increasing trend in the United States is grandparents as parents. It is not typical adoption, but it is a different set of parents taking care of the child other than his or her birth parents. The ramifications of this scenario are important to understand.

According to Larsen:

There are many reasons for this surprise responsibility especially upon seniors: death, neglect, abandonment, involvement with drugs and/or alcohol, incarceration, physical and/or sexual abuse, and mental illness. The usual alternative for the kids is foster homes, but none of the grandparents want that. This often sudden situation is occurring in all ethnic groups and at all socio-economic levels.

The stress of this unforeseen development on the seniors is not just emotional and mental, but financial. They have worked all their life for retirement, and now find themselves using that money for food, clothes, shelter, medical bills, etc., for the children. The word grand is taken out of the experience, and they are parents all over again. Only, this time they are raising kids in a time when things are different from when they raised their own children.

They are out of touch with the generation and experiences of their

grandchildren.

Continues Larsen:

It is a law in many states that a relative be considered first for the placement of children if their parents are unable to care for them. In July of 1987 the number of children placed in out of home care with relatives totaled 9,846. A year later the monthly figure has increased (steadily) to 10,995. The majority of these are grandparents.

The children in the middle of all this find themselves resentful, guilty, sometimes insecure, and grasping at hope—at an age when they should taste the sweetness of childhood. Apparent attitudes of such children are

**Resentment.** 'No one to toss a ball with them.'

**Guilt.** 'That parents split up, and putting their old grandparents out.'

**Insecurity.** 'That their grandparent will pass away, and then what?'

**Hope.** 'That their parents will return, and they'll live happily ever after.'

One child's response is a good summary of the way the rest of the kids in the article responded. When you are with your grandparents, you are closer to your family ties, but sometimes I think I would rather be brought up by regular-aged parents, because grandparents have less patience and are over-protective. They want everything done as perfect as possible. They don't understand what it is like to be a kid, they think we should be just like adults.

There are advantages and disadvantages to being raised by grandparents instead of being adopted by a family that one does not know. Some key questions emerge.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. How would you feel if you were in a situation in which a guardian needed to be assigned to care for you?
2. Do you feel it is important for extended families to assume responsibility of guardianship for children in their families who have

- become parentless?
3. When is it more appropriate to have outsiders assume the role of guardianship?
  4. How would you feel, as an older adult, if suddenly you were responsible to care for much younger children—basically raising a second family as an adult?

## **IMPLICATIONS**

1. If this is a growing trend, we must be aware of it. There are things that a child being raised by a grandparent may lack. The young person needs someone to pay more attention to helping him/her have fun, playing ball in the park, taking him/her places, spending energy on him/her, etc. Youth workers can enhance the young person's life.
2. Adopted kids have insecurities. The guardian may die, leaving the child parentless. For this reason, these youth may cling to a youth leader, or significant other, more than others. A youth worker needs to know how much attention to reciprocate. One may also need to serve these kids as a father or mother role model at times. The youth leader may be their only proper role model in this significant point in their lives.
3. When dealing with kids who are being raised by their grandparents, be sensitive to the values and standards of the older generation imposed on the younger generation. As youth leaders, it is vital to help kids process their situation, as well as to help them understand the authority they are supposed to obey.
4. Supportive ways we need to encourage parents to think and provide for kids' futures with or without them. Questions such as guardianship need to be approached for the sake of the kid.
5. Youth workers also need to consider the distress experienced by the grandparents. Be willing to become involved with the grandparents if you are going to involve yourself with the child. One can help by bridging the generational gap between the child and the grandparents. Sharing with the grandparents the needs of the child and communicating to the child the situation and their need of their grandparents will help both sides of the relationship.