

PREVENTION FIRST 



# CAREGIVER RESOURCE TOOLKIT

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Caring for a child in the absence of their parent, whether due to incarceration or substance use, can be incredibly complex. **Navigating the justice system is often confusing, and legal jargon is difficult to decipher.** For those stepping into a caregiver role, this toolkit provides:

- Essential Resources
- Explanations
- Contacts

**It is designed to assist caregivers in navigating the legal, social, and emotional systems they may encounter while supporting the child in their care.**

Please keep in mind that this information is **not** legal advice—just helpful tips and suggestions to guide caregivers through a challenging system from those who have experienced it firsthand. For legal matters, always speak with a licensed attorney.

## Justice System

When navigating the justice system on behalf of your child, you may be inundated with terms you've never heard before. You must understand the laws that impact you and the child you care for to protect your child's rights and make the decisions that will benefit your family the most.

Some terms you might hear...

### GUARDIANSHIP

#### TEMPORARY GUARDIANSHIP

A short-term arrangement allowing a non-parent to make decisions for a child for up to 365 days. The parent can end the arrangement at any time, offering a flexible but limited solution. There is no cost associated with this arrangement.

#### PRIVATE LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP

A more formal and long-term legal arrangement that requires court approval and legal representation. Once granted, it provides the caregiver with decision-making authority and cannot be revoked without legal petition by the parent and court approval. There are fees associated with this arrangement.

## TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS

### VOLUNTARY

A parent can willingly surrender their legal rights, but this must be reviewed and approved by a judge to ensure it's in the child's best interest.

### INVOLUNTARY

The court can terminate parental rights if it finds evidence that parent is unable to properly care for the child.

Remember: Termination **permanently** severs the legal parent-child relationship, and the parent has no legal rights or obligations regarding the child.

## GUARDIAN AD LITEM

A Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) is an attorney appointed by the court to represent the child's best interest.

Some people refer to the GAL as "the eyes and ears of a judge", because it is their job to help the judge make decisions that are best for the child.

The GAL will sometimes conduct interviews.<sup>(1)</sup> Despite the name, the GAL is not a guardian. They don't have legal authority over the child and cannot make decisions on their behalf.<sup>(1)</sup>

## Legal Programs

The following organizations may be able to offer your family free or low-cost support as you navigate the justice system.

Free or low-cost support:

### COOK COUNTY

**Cabrini Green Legal Aid**  
[cglanet.net](http://cglanet.net)

Provides legal services to low-income families, particularly those impacted by incarceration, to help them navigate custody and guardianship issues.

### SPRINGFIELD & NEIGHBORING AREAS

**The Parent Place**  
[tppos.org](http://tppos.org)

Provides guardianship assistance and support to families and may offer resource referrals to other organizations. The Parent Place also offers monthly support groups for grandparents and other relatives raising children.

# Social Welfare System

Families often require additional financial, medical, and educational support on their caregiving journey. A lack of resources may lead families to believe that they are unable to take a young family member into their home.

The Kinship in Demand (KIND) Act ensures that kinship caregivers (often grandparents or relatives) receive the same level of support as foster parents when children are placed with them by DCFS.

In Illinois, the Kinship in Demand (KIND) Act prioritizes placing children in foster care with relatives and ensures that kinship caregivers receive support.

The following public programs and services may offer the financial, medical, and educational support your family needs to create an environment where the child you care for thrives.

## Programs and Services

### PROJECT CHILD

[projectchild.net](http://projectchild.net)

Offers assistance in covering childcare expenses for eligible caregivers.

(Clay, Crawford, Edwards, Effingham, Fayette, Jasper, Jefferson, Lawrence, Marion, Richland, Wabash, and Wayne counties)

### CHILD CARE AWARE

[childcareaware.org](http://childcareaware.org)

Provides information, resources, and connections to Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&R) that help caregivers find local child care. They may offer financial assistance options.

### HEAD START

[headstart.gov](http://headstart.gov)

A federally funded early education program for low-income families that provides preschool, nutrition, and family support.

### ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES ([IDHS](http://idhs.gov))

The following public programs may offer your family additional financial support for food, education, and medical care.

#### **TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)

Monthly cash assistance for income-eligible families with children.

#### **Medicaid**

State health insurance that covers doctor visits, prescriptions, and hospital care for income-eligible families.

#### **SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)

Monthly benefits for purchasing groceries for income-eligible families.

Learn more about the TANF, Medicaid, and SNAP programs and your family's eligibility for these programs at: [www.dhs.state.il.us](http://www.dhs.state.il.us).



## IDHS CONT'D

### **WIC** (Women, Infants, and Children)

Nutrition education and food support for pregnant women and children under five.

Learn more about WIC at:  
[www.dhs.state.il.us](http://www.dhs.state.il.us).

### **Early Intervention** (Birth-3)

Provides therapy services—speech, physical, developmental—for infants and toddlers with delays or disabilities.

Learn more about Early Intervention at:  
[www.dhs.state.il.us](http://www.dhs.state.il.us).

## **ILLINOIS HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (IHDA)** [ihda.org](http://ihda.org)

Provides information regarding affordable housing assistance, including home buying and rental housing.

## **SOCIAL SECURITY SURVIVOR BENEFITS**

[www.ssa.gov/survivor](http://www.ssa.gov/survivor)

Financial support for children whose parent(s) have died.

## **AGENCY ON AGING**

[ilaging.illinois.gov](http://ilaging.illinois.gov)

May offer financial or support resources for grandparents raising grandchildren through their Grandparents Raising Grandchildren fund. These funds can be used to pay for summer camp, daycare, and other expenses.

You can find your local Agency on Aging (AAA) using this locator: [Provider Search](#)

Please note: funds are not always available and are subject to the availability of grants. Please call your local Agency on Aging for current funding availability.

## **DIVISION OF SPECIALIZED CARE FOR CHILDREN** [\(DSCC\)](#)

Assists families caring for children with specialized healthcare needs.

To view the qualifying list of medical needs, visit: [dscc.uic.edu](http://dscc.uic.edu).

## **Additional Support Services**

### **LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS**

Offer free or low-cost services like parenting classes, immunizations, and family health resources.

## Tax Credits

You may be eligible for certain tax credits while raising your child. Please note that not all tax credits will be available in every situation. Consult a tax professional for appropriate guidance.

You may be eligible:

### **EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)**

Extra refund for working caregivers with low to moderate income.<sup>(2)</sup>

### **CHILD TAX CREDIT**

This credit helps families with qualifying children get a tax break. You may be able to claim the credit even if you don't normally file a tax return.<sup>(3)</sup>

### **CHILD AND DEPENDENT CARE CREDIT**

If you paid someone to care for your child, you may be able to take the credit for child and dependent care expenses.<sup>(4)</sup>

### **ADOPTION TAX CREDIT**

If you adopt an eligible child, you can claim the Adoption Credit on your federal income taxes. This includes kinship placements.<sup>(5)</sup>

## Additional Contacts

**DCFS** (DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES) [dcfs.illinois.gov](https://dcfs.illinois.gov)

Promotes the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families by responding to reports of potential abuse and neglect and, when needed, providing family-centered care and connection to resources.

**MCKINNEY-VENTO PROGRAM**  
[isbe.net/homeless](https://isbe.net/homeless)

Ensures school access and support for children experiencing homelessness.

### **SALVATION ARMY**

Check your local Salvation Army for their offerings.

### **LOCAL FOOD PANTRIES**

Your local food pantry will offer free groceries to families in need—often found through churches or community centers.

## Additional Contacts CONT'D

### SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS OR COUNSELORS

Your child's school social workers and counselors can assist your family with school-based supports, behavioral health referrals, and access to services.

### CHECKDEC APP

[checkdec.org](https://checkdec.org)

Use this mobile app to find nearby resources based on your zip code.

## Community Support Systems

Beyond practical needs, caregivers and their children need emotional and psychological support. Check out these resources that assist families coping with trauma, substance use disorder, loss, and stress.

### NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR DRUG ENDANGERED CHILDREN

[nationaldec.org](https://nationaldec.org)

Trains professionals and caregivers on how to support children impacted by drug use in the home.

### SESAME WORKSHOP ON PARENTAL ADDICTION

[sesameworkshop.org](https://sesameworkshop.org)

Sesame Street offers a webpage specific to parental addiction, featuring tools like videos, stories, and activities to help young children process addiction in the family. There are Spanish language options available.

## Emotional and Psychological Support Resources

### NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN OF ADDICTION

[nacoa.org](https://nacoa.org)

Resources for youth affected by parental substance abuse, including education and support.

### ALATEEN/AL-ANON

[al-anon.org](https://al-anon.org)

Peer support groups for teenagers and families of individuals struggling with alcohol addiction.

### **CIRCLE OF CARE**

[illinoisfamilyresources.org](http://illinoisfamilyresources.org)

Support for children, youth, and families grieving loss due to substance misuse-related death and disorders. View their comprehensive resource directory for various services throughout the state.

### **ILLINOIS FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER**

[illinoisfamilyresources.org](http://illinoisfamilyresources.org)

Works to ensure family involvement and input in all aspects of family and community services within the Illinois substance use treatment system.

### **HAZELDEN BETTY FORD FOUNDATION**

[hazeldenbettyford.org](http://hazeldenbettyford.org)

Offers therapy, education, and support groups—both in-person and online—for families impacted by addiction.

### **CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS OF ILLINOIS**

[childrensadvocacycentersofillinois.org](http://childrensadvocacycentersofillinois.org)

Provides counseling and advocacy for affected children.

### **ILLINOIS COALITION AGAINST**

**SEXUAL ASSAULT (ICASA)** [icasa.org](http://icasa.org)

Provides 24/7 crisis support, counseling, and legal advocacy for victims of sexual assault. Their counseling is free.

### **LOCAL & PEER SUPPORT GROUPS**

Most counties in Illinois will have local peer support groups. These groups allow you to meet, connect, and problem solve with other caregivers. Ask your child's school guidance counselor or your case manager for options that are local to your area.

#### **Foster Parent Support Groups**

A foster parent support group can provide community, advice, and stress-relief strategies. You may be able to participate in a DCFS facilitated group virtually.

#### **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Groups**



# Recommended Books for Children and Caregivers

This book list may give you and your family additional tools to facilitate conversation and connection. Make sure to check your local library for their availability. If your local library doesn't carry a particular title, you may be able to request that they purchase it. Ask your local librarian for more details.

## **Understanding Addiction and Recovery Through a Child's Eyes**

By Jerry Moe

## **We Recovered Too**

By Michael Fitzpatrick

## **Timbi Talks About Addiction**

By Trish Healy Luna & Janet Healy Hellier

## **Lambi Learns About Addiction**

By Trish Luna

## **"Play, Talk, Imagine"**

via the Sesame Street Workshop website

## **My Body Belongs to Me**

By Jill Starishevsky

Funding for this program is provided in whole or in part through the Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Block Grant through the American Rescue Plan Act.

## GET IN TOUCH

For more information on the impact of parental substance use or incarceration on young people and resources to support yourself and others, please visit [www.prevention.org/youth-and-caregiver-resource-center](http://www.prevention.org/youth-and-caregiver-resource-center)



800.252.8951



[www.prevention.org](http://www.prevention.org)



[ycrc@prevention.org](mailto:ycrc@prevention.org)

### Sources:

- (1) Guardian ad Litem (GAL) basics, <https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/legal-information/guardian-ad-litem-gal-basics>.
- (2) Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit-eitc>.
- (3) Child Tax Credit, <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/child-tax-credit>.
- (4) Child and Dependent Care Credit information, <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/child-and-dependent-care-credit-information>.
- (5) Adoption Credit, <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/adoption-credit>.