

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.⁽¹⁾ 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.⁽¹⁾

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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.

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.

ILLINOIS HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (IHDA) ihda.org

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

SOCIAL SECURITY SURVIVOR BENEFITS

www.ssa.gov/survivor

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

AGENCY ON AGING

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: dsccl.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.⁽²⁾

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.⁽³⁾

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.⁽⁴⁾

ADOPTION TAX CREDIT

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

Additional Contacts

DCFS (DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES) 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

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

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

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

SESAME WORKSHOP ON PARENTAL ADDICTION 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

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

ALATEEN/AL-ANON al-anon.org

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

CIRCLE OF CARE

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

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

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

CHILD ADVOCACY CENTERS OF ILLINOIS

childrensadvocacycentersofillinois.org

Provides counseling and advocacy for affected children.

ILLINOIS COALITION AGAINST

SEXUAL ASSAULT (ICASA) 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

 800.252.8951

 www.prevention.org

 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>.