

# Issues in Kinship Care

## Positives

### **They Already Know You:**

Likely the child already has a relationship with you. This means that they already have some sense of attachment, which makes placement with you far more likely to succeed. When children are placed with strangers they often struggle with creating new connections such that their behavior regresses and they are often unable to trust or believe in the stability of their “new family.”

### **Less Interruptions For Children:**

Oftentimes the new caregiver may live in the same vicinity that the child already knows. At a minimum, family gatherings will be maintained so that the child will not lose familial relationships. Perhaps there will be other areas of the child’s life that will also be able to be maintained, like religious community, neighborhood, or school.

### **Shared History and Legacies:**

Adopted children and adults have long struggled with the loss of information and history that so often occurs when children are placed with “stranger” families. In kinship adoption, not only is this loss mitigated, but also the child is living with others who share his or her history and heritage. The value of maintaining this continuity of identity cannot be overestimated.

## Challenges

### **Shame/Anger/Resentment:**

Other people’s assumptions (sometimes including professionals) that the apple doesn’t far fall from the tree can present challenges for caregivers who may have to defend their suitability to care for the child while struggling with their own ambiguous feelings about becoming a “parent” in this way. Often the timing is off, for example; a grandmother who ready to retire but has to continue to work in order to support her grandchild or the aunt whose friends are living the single life, traveling, partying etc while she must attend school meetings and therapy sessions. Sometimes exhaustion can feel overwhelming when an active choice to parent was taken out of the caregiver’s hands.

### **Transference & Projection:**

Caregivers may struggle with fears about history of parents being revisited in the child like drug/alcohol dependence or criminal behavior. Secondly, the caregiver may experience anger toward the child because their parent(s) didn’t get it together and forced them into a role they weren’t planning on or wanting.

### **Split Loyalties:**

What should the child call you? What should you call the child? When do you tell them that who their “real” mother/father are? The caregiver often loves the parent and the child, creating a dilemma about who to take care of when. Handling situations when the parent wants something from the child that they may not be able to give or might not be good for them to give can be very challenging.

### **Redefining Roles & Boundaries:**

Who decides and makes parenting choices for the child? How will you relate to the birth parent now that they are not parenting their child? How will the child related to each of you if/when you are all together at family gatherings?

# Issues in Kinship Care, cont'd.

## Difficult Situations

- o **Managing your feelings**  
when the child wants to take care of their parent because they feel sorry for them
- o **Being more permissive or more strict**  
than you probably should be
- o **Deciding who to take care of**  
when both the child and the parent (who may be your child) need something from you
- o **Bad Behavior**
  - Drugs/Alcohol Abuse
  - Incarceration
  - Mental Illness
  - Criminal Behavior
  - Abuse

## Solutions

### **Making Decisions on Children's Behalf:**

Distinguish between honoring the birth parent and making parenting decisions.

### **Self care and Support:**

Find others who share your experience; isolation is a common theme among kin caregivers.

### **Role Clarity:**

If you are taking care of the child now because of unsafe behaviors or inability to give the child what they need on the part of the parent then you have to make the choices based on what is best for the child.

### **Never Ask Anyone To Chose Sides:**

Give the child permission to love their birth parents and make sure they know that adults decide who gets to take care of them, it isn't their fault or their responsibility.

### **Tell it Like It Is:**

Use appropriate names according to the traditions and relationships that exist within your family.

### **Be A Straight Shooter With The Child's Parent:**

Don't get involved with drama, be honest and tell the child's parent you want them to have a positive relationship even if they can't make decisions for their child right now.