

# Kinnections

A newsletter of the Kinship Care Resource Center

## Choosing Connection over Conflict *by John K. Mooradian, Ph.D, LMSW, LMFT*

One of the challenges kinship caregivers face involves organizing their child's contact and connection with all the other adult family members in their life. When grandmothers, aunts, sisters, grandfathers, uncles, or brothers agree to child-raising responsibilities, they often wonder how to handle each other and the child's parents. Although there are specific things to consider, like the situations leading to kinship care, family culture, sex and age of the child, and the health of caregivers, there is one thing that usually helps.

are the unspoken rules that manage closeness and distance in families. Boundaries are formed through actions. In a family with good boundaries, the child is protected from adult conflicts. Adult business stays adult business.

Three kinds of problems with boundaries happen when adults don't manage their conflicts very well.

1. One problem comes up when adults compete for the attention, love, or approval of the child – they try to draw the child close by pulling him or her away from someone else. These children usually try to keep the peace, and become very sensitive to uncomfortable feelings like adult anger.

2. The second problem occurs when adults get along by agreeing that the child is the problem – they avoid conflict with each other by having a “bad” or “sick” kid. These children often get anxious or depressed.

3. The third problem happens when no adult forms a close relationship with the child – everyone is too distracted or confused to connect with the child. These children tend to act out by getting in fights or other kinds of trouble at school and in the neighborhood.

The solution to all of these problems is the same. It's not easy, but it's necessary.

*Cont'd on pg. 2...*



### Inside this issue:

Tax Preparation Help	2
Family Dynamics	3
Keeping Kids Healthy	4
Kinship Support	4
Keeping Kids Safe	5
Snow day Activities	5

Managing the complex roles and relationships in kinship care involves setting clear family boundaries. Boundaries

## Helpful Hints for Tax Preparation

It may seem like tax season is a ways away, but the time to start preparing to file your tax return is quickly approaching. It is best to start preparing in advance in order to make sure that the information presented on your tax return is correct and current. The US Tax Center provides a list of the most basic tips to consider when preparing to file a tax return. The US Tax Center recommends using a check-

list, get tax help if need be, triple check your work, start preparing early, and give yourself enough time by being aware of the deadlines. To read more about the US Tax Center's tax preparation tips, visit: <http://www.irs.com/articles/tax-preparation-tips-2>.

For low-income families, there are some additional tips that can help when preparing to file your taxes. If you are working you will want to make sure to take advantage

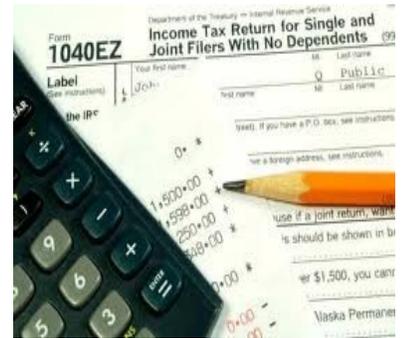
of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) (see article below). In addition, you may qualify for tax preparation assistance through the VITA program. There is also Free File for families with an Adjusted Gross Income of less than \$57,000. Find out more by visiting [www.michiganeic.org/freetaxprep](http://www.michiganeic.org/freetaxprep) or dial 2-1-1 to obtain information on your local VITA program.

## Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

One of the tips mentioned above for low income individuals and families was investigating the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program. This is a program that exists for low income individuals and families and provides benefits for certain people who work and have low to

moderate wages by reducing the amount of tax you owe and may also give you a refund. This credit covers kinship families by including grandchildren, nieces and nephews as qualifying children as long as they lived with you for

more than half the year. The income limits and other requirements as well as additional information about the EITC program can be found at: <http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/EITC,-Earned-Income-Tax-Credit,-Questions-and-Answers>



## Choosing Connection cont'd.

Kinship caregivers have to form close one-to-one relationships with their child. They have to separate their own conflicts with other family members from their relationship with their child. The best way to do this is to create a personal experience of connection with their child. For example, each week – or better yet, every day – a caregiver can simply make time to share an

activity that the child enjoys. This time cannot include discipline, criticism, direction, complaints, explanations, or excuses. This kind of experience helps children learn that they are valued as individuals and they have at least one adult to count on.

John Mooradian is an Associate Professor of Clinical Social Work with Families. His interests include trauma and resilience, adolescent

therapy and couples and family therapy. He is a Clinical Member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.

## Raising H. *by Jan Wagner,*

As of September 27, 2012, my husband and I are the adoptive (Grand)Parents of 6 year old Holden. I was there during his birth and except for a few short absences, he has been an integral part of our home for most of his life. We became his full time caregivers 2 weeks after his second birthday, and received “informal “guardianship through family court six months later. We are both in our 60s

When people find out that we are raising a Grand-child we hear all the praises of what a lucky little boy he is to have us, what an honorable thing we are doing, how they

could never do this . Well, aside from waiting for my wings and halo to arrive on the UPS truck, I have to respond that we are the lucky ones. My motives are purely selfish. I have the advantage of knowing where my Grandson is at all times. I know that he is safe, well cared for and loved beyond all reason. I know that he has a chance for a future. I know that his needs will be met before he is even aware the he has any. He has the privilege of knowing where he came from and to grow up with the family he



was born into. And he will always have a connection to his birth mother. I like who we are since becoming his caregivers. We are too involved in raising another child to become “old” and opinionated. We have been able to let go of the life we had planned for the life we have.

There are downsides. We are at a real disadvantage when it comes to having peers. The invitations to childfree activities have finally stopped altogether. As any parent of a young child knows, you cannot be spontaneous when it comes to packing up a child for a weekend get away even if by some remote chance all three of us were invited. It is a fine line we walk with our other adult children and our other grandchildren. And then there are the complexities of “other” family involvement. Lastly, quality and quantity of care are both difficult to achieve when you barely have the physical stamina to keep from crawling back in bed in the morning after a long night with a feverish or nightmarish child between you.

Financially, there isn't any specific Government support for informal Kinship caregivers, and what we have obtained has been piecemeal and mostly ended when we adopted Holden. We do not have access to the services and resources that children and caregivers involved with child welfare system have,

even though Hayden's physical and psychological needs are not much different. We have spent our small retirement fund, increased our second mortgage so it surpasses our first, and we no longer visit my brother in Palm Beach for a month. The focus is on giving Holden a healthy and secure future.

My hope is to challenge those working with Kinship families to take the time to understand the unique needs we have. To help us gain access to the parent trainings and other services that Michigan's resource families have access to.

“My motives are purely selfish. I have the advantage of knowing where my Grandson is at all times. I know that he is safe, well cared for and loved beyond all reason.”

Jan Wagner is Mom, Momma, Mommy to Holden; Kinship Chair-MAFAK; Kinship Chair sub-committee under diversity for NFPA; Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Kinship Family Support Group co-ordinator/facilitator; Foster/Adopt PRIDE Trainer; Kinship Pride Trainer; Trauma trainer; Licensed Foster Parent; Advocate; and Voice for Kinship Caregiver Awareness to whoever will listen.

**You can follow Jan's story of Raising H. on her blog at <http://jdwags.blogspot.com>**

## Avoiding the Flu and Norovirus

Keep your Kleenex close by, it's that time of year again -- The Flu and Norovirus are in full force and caregivers are doing all they can to keep their child as well as themselves healthy and to prevent them from coming down with the flu or the Norovirus. There are precautions that caregivers can take to help prevent

The flu season peaks in January and February and tends to come in the form of a respiratory issue.

kids from getting sick and staying healthy this flu season. The flu and the Norovirus (also commonly called the "stomach flu" or "food poisoning") are two of the most common illnesses that get passed around during the winter months. They are commonly thought to be the same sickness, but in actuality are two different viruses. To learn more about the Norovirus as well as the symptoms and treatment of the virus, visit: <http://www.healthynj.org/diseases/norovirus.html>.

The flu season peaks in January and February and tends to come in the form of a respiratory issue rather than a stomach bug like the Norovirus. As with the Norovirus, the flu is highly contagious, making it important for caregivers

to work to prevent their child from getting the flu. To learn more about preventing the flu, visit: <http://www.flu.gov/prevention-vaccination/prevention/index.html#>. Unfortunately, the flu and the Norovirus are not the only illnesses that are easily spread during cold and flu season. In addition to these, there are multiple other

sicknesses that are easily spread during the winter months. Caregivers as well as other adults can help to prevent these illnesses from spreading. To learn a few tips about how to prevent illness and to keep kids healthy visit: <http://www.justthefactsbaby.com/baby/article/keeping-kids-healthy/119>



## Support for Kinship Caregivers

Having just passed into another New Year, the majority of people have set New Year's Resolutions and have brainstormed ways in which



they plan to better themselves or their surroundings. A lot of people resolve to finally start exercising and eating healthy, some others resolve to spend more time with friends and family. Even though we are a few weeks past the New Year, it is never too late to enhance your life. One way in which kinship caregivers and families may be interested in accomplishing this is to create a better support

network for themselves and others going through similar situations. The AARP has produced an article that discusses the challenges of raising grandchildren (as well as other kinship children) and the importance of finding and utilizing support groups. To read more about the importance of support groups for kinship caregivers, visit: <http://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-support.html?>

## Keeping Kids Safe

As the holiday season has just ended, for most families that means new toys, new furniture, and new equipment for your child. But how do you know for sure that these new items are safe for your child? A non-profit organization called KID works to promote the safety of children. One of the ways in

which they accomplish this task is by providing grandparents and child care providers with a monthly newsletter that contains a list of the month's latest recalls. To learn more about the KID organization or to find a list of recently recalled items, visit:

<http://www.kidsindanger.org/grandparents>.



## What to do When You're Stuck Indoors on Cold Days

The winter months can be long and can limit the times in which children and teenagers can spend their afternoons outdoors. Being prepared with indoor activities for those long winter months filled with unexpected days stuck at home due to school cancellations can help kinship families enjoy their time stuck indoors. By following this link: <http://www.sheknows.com/>



<http://www.kidactivities.net/category/Seasonal-Winter-ArtsCrafts.aspx>. As we all

know, some activities that are entertaining and interesting for children do not hold the same interest of teenagers. Teenagers have their own interests and finding activities for teens to participate in on snow days may be a bit more challenging. Follow this link: <http://parentingteens.about.com/od/activitiesorteens/a/winteractivitiesteens.htm> to learn about 101 activities for teenagers to do during the winter months!

Being prepared with activities ...can help kinship families enjoy their time stuck indoors.



**Kinship Care  
Resource Center**

School of Social Work  
Michigan State  
University  
655 Auditorium Rd  
East Lansing, MI 48824

Phone: 517-355-9600  
Toll-Free: 800-535-1218  
E-mail: [kinship@msu.edu](mailto:kinship@msu.edu)

**Would you like to receive our newsletter directly? Simply call us or send us an e-mail and we will add you to our mailing list.**

---

**We're on the web!**  
[kinship@msu.edu](mailto:kinship@msu.edu)

---



**Share this  
newsletter with a  
kinship caregiver  
you know!!**

The Kinship Care Resource Center is a non-profit statewide organization through the School of Social Work at Michigan State University. The mission of the Kinship Care Resource Center is to support Michigan's kinship families by utilizing research to provide education and outreach to communities and agencies supporting kinship families and offer information and referral and case management services to relatives raising relative children. If you would like additional information about the MSU Kinship Care Resource Center, call (517) 355-9600 or e-mail us at [kinship@msu.edu](mailto:kinship@msu.edu)

You can also find us on Facebook—Michigan Kinship Care Resource Center at MSU and Twitter @KinshipCareMI!