

Grandparents as Parents: Supporting Hawaii's "Tutu" Caregivers

In Hawaii, the Tutu (grandparent) is the heart of the family, typically a source of wisdom and spoiling. However, due to economic hardship, substance abuse issues, or other family crises, a growing number of grandparents are stepping back into the role of primary parent. They are raising a second generation of children at a time in life when they are expected to be slowing down. While this act of love keeps children out of the foster care system and within the ohana, it comes with significant physical, emotional, and financial costs.

This dynamic creates a complex family structure that requires careful navigation. **Family Counseling Hawaii** services are seeing an influx of grandparent-headed households seeking support. These families face a unique set of challenges: the grandparents' fatigue, the grandchildren's trauma, and the often-complicated relationship with the biological parents.

The Grief of the "Golden Years"

Many grandparents feel a secret grief over the loss of their retirement plans. Instead of traveling or relaxing, they are navigating school runs, puberty, and tantrums. They may feel guilty for this resentment, believing they should just be grateful to help.

Therapy validates these mixed emotions. It is possible to love your grandchildren fiercely and also mourn the loss of your freedom. Acknowledging this truth prevents burnout. It allows caregivers to prioritize their own health, realizing that they must be well to care for the keiki.

Navigating the Relationship with Biological Parents

The most volatile aspect of this arrangement is often the relationship with the biological parents (the grandparent's own children). If the parents are absent due to addiction or incarceration, the grandparent carries the burden of explaining this to the child. If the parents are present but unable to parent, there can be power struggles and confusion about who is in charge.

Family counseling helps establish clear boundaries. It helps grandparents move from an "enabling" dynamic to an "empowering" one. It provides scripts for protecting the grandchildren from parental inconsistency while maintaining a respectful connection to their lineage.

Bridging the Generational Gap

Raising a child in the 2020s is vastly different from raising a child in the 1980s or 90s. Grandparents often struggle with modern challenges like social media, cyberbullying, and changing educational standards. The generational gap can lead to conflict and misunderstanding.

Therapy acts as a bridge. It educates grandparents on the modern pressures youth face, fostering empathy. Simultaneously, it helps children appreciate the wisdom and stability their grandparents offer. It turns the generation gap into an opportunity for mutual learning.

Building a Village of Support

Grandparents raising grandchildren can feel isolated from their peers, who are enjoying empty nests. They may feel out of place at school PTA meetings surrounded by young parents.

Connecting with support groups and family therapy helps build a new village. It reminds these heroic caregivers that they are not alone. It provides a space to vent, share resources, and celebrate the unique bond that forms in these resilient families.

Conclusion

To the Tutus and Papas stepping up: your sacrifice is the ultimate expression of aloha. But you do not have to carry this load in silence. Professional support can help you navigate the complexities of your new role, ensuring that both you and your grandchildren thrive.

Call to Action

If you are a grandparent raising a second generation, support is available. Let us help you strengthen your family and preserve your well-being.

Visit: <https://wellnesscounselinghawaii.org/>