



# HOW TO...

## support all the caregivers in baby's life

Watch the [recording here](#) of the Practical Workshop hosted by Sikunye, discussing how to support the nonparent caregivers in baby's life. Often, we focus on young moms and first-time moms, but what is it that extended family like gran and aunt not experiencing when caring for a child. So, we are going to look at How can churches surround families that are blended or have "kinship care" as most families have an additional caregiver of a child.

*"Parenting is parenting, whether you gave birth to them or not!"*

'**Kinship care**' is simply a way of describing families where children are looked after by grandparents, aunts, uncles or other relatives who are not their parents. Or **caregiver** is a broader term and includes any person with whom the child lives who



provides daily care to the child, and who acts as the child's 'parent' whether they are biological parents or not. And sometimes the word **nonparent caregiver** is used for adults who are caring for children living in their homes without their parents.

Statistics on children in South Africa stats that 19,7% of children live without any biological parent. But we also know that in single parent households often another caregiver steps in to care for the child – and these caregivers need support too – especially in the First Thousand Days (FTD).

So, there are some helpful and unhelpful things that the local church can do in supporting caregivers who are caring for a child that is not their own. No matter the make-up of families in church, congregations can do certain things to support blended families if they have the will to do so:

- **Talk to members of your church** about foster parents, stepparents, and step-grandparents.
- **Acknowledge blended families** (with nonparent caregivers) as part of their local congregation and build a bridge to connect with them.

- **Acknowledge nonparent caregivers** in the church, especially at dates such as Father's Day or Mother's Day. Acknowledge them from the pulpit, and perhaps have a nonparent caregiver/blended family couple share their story.
- **Form midweek meetings** with families who also have nonparent caregivers looking after children, so that families with older children can mentor those families with a child in FTD.
- **Find out how** someone can foster or adopt a child to help pastorally care for a family/individual thinking of doing this.
- **Watch the words used** when talking to nonparent caregivers. Comments like "those poor kids, no real parents" or "where is this child's mother" to a stepparent or adoptive parent are not helpful, and they shame the caregiver that has stepped in to raise the child. Words that affirm that child's place in that family are important.

**Grandparents** usually have the benefit of interacting with their grandkids but for many grandparenting means a weekend together every now and then, an afternoon play date, an evening babysitting, a holiday, or chats on the phone. But when life circumstances change—through a divorce, the death of parents, or changes to a parent's work or school-related responsibilities, for example—it often falls to grandparents to assume full- or part-time responsibility for their grandchildren. A growing number of grandparents are now taking on the parenting role for their grandchildren. This often means giving up many aspects of independence. And once again take on responsibility for the day-to-day maintenance of a home and when it is in the First Thousand Days there is still so much care that baby needs – feeding, bathing, nurturing, clinic visits, etc.

**Listen to Daisy's interview** to hear what her church did to support her and her granddaughter.

### some tips on how to support grandparents:

- Find a grandmother that you can talk to and see what she needs
- Have a support group for grandparents
- Offer childcare
- Grandmothers can be struggling to raise the children on her pension and with limited support from the rest of the family. Also, the energy to manage very busy

children dependent on her health and age. See if she/he qualifies for a SASSA grant or can your church raise money?

- Empower grandparents to raise resilient and healthy children by creating a healthy attachment bond with the child. Give ideas for engagement like love, play, talk and how to build a strong trusting relationship – this can be exceptionally hard if there has been loss or trauma in the child's life.

## some tips on how you can support other nonparent caregivers:

All children need to belong in thriving families no matter how families are formed.

- All families need support to provide responsive nurturing care. Some families need targeted support – home-visiting?
- “See the caregiver” – who she/he is, with no judgement.
- “Listen to them” – find out what support would be helpful in their situation.
- You can provide practical support as you would any other family who has just given birth:
  - o Provide Meals
  - o Care packs (nappies, clothes (via donations or 2nd hand items) formula milk; meals; offer to babysit; toys, books)
  - o Check in regularly with the caregiver
  - o Help find other families in similar phase of FTD that can support that family (e.g. find a family that adopted a child who is older to mentor a family who has just adopted)
  - o Provide helpful information on the nurturing care framework and how to build baby's brain also applies. Encourage the caregiver to bond with baby, play with baby, talk to baby, love baby – as you would for a biological parent
  - o Provide parenting skills courses
  - o The entire church can love the child as their own – **be the village that raises the child**
  - o See if the family qualifies for a SASSA grant (especially for foster, adoptive families)
- Pray for and with the caregiver. Prayer support is very valuable
- They also need time to “take a break” – offer babysitting or caring for other children
- They also need love, good nutrition, good health – because if they are not taking care of themselves, they will not care well for a child

- Try to understand the challenges that they are going through
- Do they need a social father or mother? The church can be the extend family for that child
- Do they need counselling? There may be loss, grief, trauma, or other struggles that need to be supported in the family
- Remember to include them in your parenting days – as they are parents – so use inclusive language to help all caregivers to feel seen – affirm the important role that they play
- Collaborate with Organisations like Arise; Wandisa, Naomi's Joy, Kin culture who work with and support foster or care families, adoptive parents, temporary safe care families, parents who are caring for children who aren't born to them and have no legal care order for
- Speak into the stigma around nonparent caregiving and the unhelpful things people say or assumptions people make and replace them with truth especially God's redeeming truth

Children can wonder if they belong, are loved or are valuable – they need assurance they still belong to a family. **Look for those nonparent caregivers in your community** – and find out what you can do to support them so that the child they are caring for knows they are loved, wanted, valuable and he/she grows up thriving in life.