



*The Grandparent's  
and Other Relative  
Caregiver's Guide to  
Food and Nutrition  
Programs for  
Children*

**WHAT YOU NEED  
TO KNOW TO  
GIVE THE CHILD  
YOU ARE RAISING  
A HEALTHY START**

## Join the Movement to Leave No Child Behind®!

**M**aking sure that all children have access to nutritious food is an important first step in giving them the tools they need to grow into healthy and productive adults. Understandably, food and nutrition supports are not enough. Children also need a good education, quality child care, safe places to live and play, and income supports to help their families stay out of poverty. Some children may also need help to take care of their special needs.

The mission of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is to *Leave No Child Behind*® and to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start*, and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. Over the months and years ahead, CDF will be calling upon committed parents, grandparents, and other relative caregivers like you to help make this vision a reality for all American children. To get involved with other concerned individuals, children's advocacy organizations, and community and faith-based groups in the national *Movement to Leave No Child Behind*®, contact the Children's Defense Fund, 25 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001 or check CDF's Web site at <http://www.childrensdefense.org>.

*CDF encourages you to copy and share this brochure with others.*

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## All Children Deserve a Healthy Start in Life

**A**re you a grandparent or other relative raising another family member's children? You are not alone. Relatives are raising more than two million children whose parents cannot care for them.

Like many relative caregivers, you may worry about whether the children you are raising are getting the food they need to grow up healthy and to be ready to learn in school. Your two teenage grandsons are growing taller every month and eat a lot. Your granddaughter may need special supplemental foods because she was born with a very low birthweight. Your monthly income may not cover all the food that your grandchildren need. Whatever the situation, you may need help feeding your grandchildren properly.

There is good news for your family! The federal government has several programs that can help you get nutritional foods for your grandchildren. You can get help to buy groceries, baby formula, and food supplements. Your grandchildren may also qualify for free or reduced-price meals and snacks at school. Millions of American families take advantage of these programs to help provide nutritious meals for their children.

Throughout this guide, we use the word “grandchildren” to refer to the children you are raising. The information is the same if you are caring for other related children such as nieces or nephews.

The guide explains what help you may be able to get and how to enroll children under your care. It tells you where you can go on the Internet to find more information to help your grandchildren. If you do not have a computer at home, go to your local public library. Most of them have computers you can use and someone to help you learn how to use them.

Remember that it might take some time and effort to find and apply for some of the food and nutrition programs in this guide. Sometimes that means calling more than one person or going to more than one place for help. But don't give up. Your grandchildren are worth the effort!

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) also has three other guides for kinship caregivers that you may find helpful. One is about getting health insurance for your grandchildren through your state Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Programs. Another one describes federal programs for children with disabilities. The third one describes child care and early childhood education programs. See pages 40-41 for information about how to get these CDF guides for kinship caregivers.

## **What Kind of Help with Food and Nutrition Can I Get for My Grandchildren?**

*Can I get help in finding nutritional foods for my grandchildren?*

Yes. There are a number of ways that you can get help to feed nutritious meals to your grandchildren. Local food banks or food pantries may have free groceries. Other groups in your community may have free government bulk food or other food items. Ask someone at your local community center or where you worship about programs in your area.

You may also be eligible to get help from federal or state programs. Check with your grandchildren's teachers to see if their school or child care program has free or reduced-price meals or snacks. Your grandchildren may qualify for these programs.

You can also ask nonprofit programs or county offices in your community to explain the other federal or state programs that are available. A good place for a grandparent caregiver to start is your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA). See pages 34-35 for information about how to call your AAA office. Staff at local food banks or legal services offices can also tell you where to apply for different federal and state food programs. This guide provides basic information about federal food programs that are likely to be available in your community.

*I'm worried about my grandchild's weight and general nutrition. What can I do?*

The first thing is to talk to your doctor or a nurse in the office or clinic where you take your grandchild for his health care. They should be able to answer your questions or refer you for special help.

There also may be a nurse or social worker at your grandchild's school who could help you. The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program may also help you meet the special nutritional needs of your grandchildren if they are under age 5. Read more about WIC on pages 16-22.

*Someone at church said there are ways I can get free groceries. What programs can help me?*

Every community has places where you can get free food for your family. Check with food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, or other emergency food providers to see if they can help you. If you don't know where these programs are, see if someone where you worship knows about them. Sometimes food banks get so many requests for food that they require a referral from your church or another social service agency before you can receive food. Make sure you call ahead to area food banks to see what kind of information is required before you go to request food items. You should also call your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to find out about free groceries in your area. See pages 34-35 for information about how to call your AAA office.

*I have enough money to buy groceries, but want to learn more about the nutritional foods my grandchildren need. Where do I go for help?*

It is important to learn about the right foods that your grandchildren need at different ages. You can learn more about this by getting books or magazines at your local public library. Ask the librarian to suggest what you can read to learn more about what foods are good for your grandchild's age group.

The federal Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion has materials you can get on the Internet. If you have a computer, go to <http://www.usda.gov/cnpp>.

The federal Food Stamp Program encourages states to provide nutrition education. Read more about eligibility for food stamps on pages 6-15. The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program also provides nutrition education. Read more about WIC on pages 16-22. If your grandchildren qualify for either of these federal programs, ask for information about nutrition.



## What Should I Know about Food Stamps?

*What are food stamps?*

Food stamps are food coupons that eligible low-income individuals and families can get. You can use them at most grocery stores. Many states now use electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards instead of coupons. An EBT card looks like a credit or bank card. All states will soon use only EBT cards.

*Why should kinship caregivers like myself want to get food stamps?*

You may find yourself in situations when you need extra help to feed your grandchildren. Perhaps you do not have enough income to pay for all the food they need. Maybe the local food bank does not always have the food items that your grandchildren will eat. Or your church no longer gives away free groceries. Whatever the reason, food stamps may help. Over 17 million people in this country get food stamps every month, and many of them are children. Food stamps can help you provide nutritious meals for your grandchildren.

*What can I get with food stamps?*

You use food stamps like cash at most stores that sell food. Generally, you can use them to buy food items that you prepare and eat at home. You can also use them to buy seeds and plants to grow food for your family to eat.

You cannot use food stamps to buy prepared hot foods that you might eat in the grocery store or at home. You cannot use them for any non-food items like toilet paper, soap, paper towels, toothpaste, or pet food. You also cannot use food stamps to buy alcohol, cigarettes, vitamins, or medicine. Food stamps are not accepted in restaurants.

*How much will I get in food stamps?*

The federal government estimates how much it costs to buy food to prepare well-balanced, low-cost meals for your household. This estimate changes every year as prices change. In recent years, the average monthly benefit was about \$70 for each person.

Staff at the food stamp office will decide how much your household should get. They look at the number of people who live in your household, their total income and resources, and the total living expenses for the household. There are limits on the amount of food stamps a household can get. Most households find that they must spend some of their own cash along with their food stamps in order to buy enough food for a month.

*How often will I get food stamps?*

Each household gets a certain amount of food stamps every month.

*Can I get food stamps for my grandchildren?*

Yes. You can use food stamps to buy groceries for your family. You can get food stamps for yourself and your grandchildren if you qualify based on your household income and resources. As a kinship family, you and your grandchildren and anyone else living in the house are treated as one household. The law defines “household” as a group of people who live together and buy and cook food together. Your household must have very limited income and resources to qualify.

*Can I get food stamps if I am only raising my grandchild for six months or if my daughter lives with us part of the time?*

The food stamp office looks at the entire household income from everyone who lives there. You must tell the food stamp office if your grandchild or daughter lives in your home part of the time. The office needs to know how much income each household member contributes. The amount of food stamps you get is based on the total number of people who live in your household.

If you qualify, the food stamp office will tell you when you must report certain information. Some households must report every month. Others are told only to report changes in the household such as when another family member comes to live with you. It is extremely important that you report any changes. You want to get the right amount of food stamps. If you get extra food stamps by not reporting changes, you must pay back their value.

*Do I have to have legal custody or guardianship of my grandchildren to apply for food stamps?*

No. Food stamps are given to “households,” which includes everyone who lives together and buys and cooks food together without regard to their legal relationship to one another.

*Can I get food stamps for myself too?*

Yes. If your household qualifies, then the amount of food stamps you get is based on the total number of people who live in it.

*How much money can we have and still qualify for food stamps?*

Your entire household must have very low income from wages, public benefits, or pensions to qualify. In addition, you also must have very limited resources such as checking or savings accounts. In general, your household can only have up to \$2,000 in resources. If your household has at least one member age 60 or older, then the limit goes up to \$3,000. Some things you own do not count as resources, like your home, life insurance policies, and cars up to a certain value.

*Is my income counted if I apply for food stamps for my grandchild?*

Yes. Your income counts as part of the household income. This includes any wages you get from a full or part-time job and any other income you have from pensions or Social Security.

*If we get food stamps, does this affect my Social Security check?*

No. Your Social Security check is not reduced if your household gets food stamps.

*Can I only get food stamps if I am on welfare?*

No. You can get food stamps even if you are not on welfare. Many people work and get food stamps. You probably qualify if you only work part-time, have a low-wage job, or live on a small pension. If you are on welfare, then you are especially likely to qualify.

*If my grandchild is eligible for foster care benefits, can my household still get food stamps?*

Maybe. The food stamp office counts your grandchild's foster care payments as part of the household income. If your grandchild's income does not put your household above the income limit, then you can still get food stamps.

*I heard that someone in my household must work in order for us to get food stamps. Is this true?*

It depends. Rules require most adults who get food stamps to register for work. Some people are excused from this requirement. For example, adults who are elderly, disabled, or caring for a child under age six are not expected to work. Each state has its own rules about whether it requires adults who get food stamps to look for a job or participate in job training activities or work. If your household qualifies for food stamps, the work requirement will be explained to you.

*Can I apply for food stamps for my grandchildren if I am not a citizen?*

Yes, you can apply. The rules generally allow certain non-citizens who are living in this country legally to get food stamps. These include refugees, people granted asylum, and most permanent residents. Even if you are not eligible yourself, you can apply for other members of your household, such as children who are citizens.

*Can my grandchildren get food stamps if they were not born in the U.S.?*

Maybe. Children under age 18 who were legally living in the U.S. on or before August 22, 1996 can get food stamps.

### *How do I apply for food stamps?*

You apply at your local food stamp office. Look in the state or local government pages of the telephone book under “Food Stamps,” “Social Services,” “Human Services” or “Public Assistance.” If you cannot find it, call the Food Stamp Hot Line at 1-800-221-5689. If you have a computer, you can also find your local food stamp office at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp>.

The food stamp office will give you an application at the time that you ask for it. You may ask for it in person, over the telephone, or by mail. Someone else can also pick it up for you. You should fill in as much information on it as you can. Then you can return it to the food stamp office in person or by mail. A food stamp worker will help you fill out the rest of the application during your interview.

### *What should I bring when I apply for food stamps?*

Usually you need a face-to-face interview as part of the application process. You must bring proof of certain information, such as your household income and expenses. You also need a Social Security number for each household member.

The program may excuse you from an interview if no household member can get to the food stamp office because of age or disability. If this happens, the food stamp office will interview you by telephone or do a home visit. They must schedule the visit before they come to your house.

*What happens after I apply for food stamps?*

After you file an application, the state will let you know if you qualify or not. You should get a letter from the state within 30 days from the time you file.

If you qualify and your state uses paper coupons, you will get an identification card to show when you pick up your food stamps. If you qualify and your state uses electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, you will get the EBT card in the mail along with information about how to use it.

*Do I have to go to the welfare office to get food stamps?*

It depends. Each state decides where people go to apply for and pick up their food stamps. Most states ask people to go to the local welfare office to file food stamp applications and to pick up their monthly food stamps. Some states have separate food stamp offices.

In states with electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards, no one has to pick up paper food coupons. Once you are found eligible, the benefits are deposited monthly into your food stamp EBT account. Someone at your local food stamp office will tell you which day of the month your food stamp benefits are deposited into your EBT account. It is the same day every month.



*Is there any way I can get food stamps and use them at my local grocery store without others in line knowing?*

Yes. There may be a way for you to get food stamps by using an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card, which the majority of states now use. The food stamp office automatically puts your benefits into your household account. This is done every month on the same date. You use the card to buy groceries and the store subtracts the cost from your household food stamp account. Also, no one from your household then has to pick up paper food coupons every month.

*Can I apply for emergency food stamps right away?*

Yes. In certain crisis situations, you can get food stamps within seven days. You can qualify if your household is homeless or if the total household income is less than \$100 at the time you apply. You can also qualify if your income will not cover your rent or mortgage and the utilities in the current month. When you call the food stamp office to apply, tell them that you need the food stamps right away.

*What if my application for food stamps is denied?*

If you do not qualify for food stamps, you will get a letter within 30 days. You have the right to ask for a “fair hearing” to find out why you did not qualify.

You must ask for a fair hearing within 90 days of getting your denial letter. You do not need to have a lawyer with you at the hearing, although you may bring one if you wish. Your local legal services or legal aid organization might have a lawyer who can represent you in a food stamp case at no cost. You should be able to find their phone numbers in your local telephone directory. If they cannot help you, ask them who else you can call. The food stamp office may give you a hearing by sending a letter with questions and asking you to answer them in writing. Or the office may ask that you appear in person. They can also do a hearing over the telephone. The food stamp office will explain the hearing rules in your state and tell you what information you need for the hearing.

## **How Can My Grandchildren Benefit from the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program?**

*Why should I apply for WIC for my grandchildren?*

The Women, Infants and Children Program, called WIC, can help you meet the special nutritional needs of your young grandchildren. If your grandchildren are under age 5, they may qualify for the WIC Program. Over 5 million children and infants get WIC benefits every month.

*What does the WIC Program offer?*

WIC provides free food and formula to eligible low-income children up to age 5. It also serves certain eligible women who are pregnant or recently had a child. WIC staff members educate caregivers about proper nutrition and refer children to health care providers.

*Who is eligible for WIC?*

The WIC Program has two sets of eligibility rules. Women and children must be low-income and also “nutritionally-at-risk.”

*What does “nutritionally-at-risk” mean?*

It means that your grandchildren must have certain types of health conditions like anemia or growth problems. Or they may need to eat more nutritious food. Children must get a health screening to see if their condition qualifies

when they apply. A doctor, nutritionist, or nurse does the free health screening. Women who are pregnant or recently had a child must also be nutritionally-at-risk to qualify.

*How much money can I have and still get WIC for my grandchildren?*

Eligibility for the program is based on your family income before taxes are taken out. If you work, there are rules that decide how much income you can have. When you apply at the local WIC office, someone will describe the income rules.

In general, families must have limited annual income to qualify. A family with four people can have about \$33,500. A few states have lower income limits that allow more families to qualify.

Some families with low incomes qualify automatically for WIC. For example, children who get food stamps, Medicaid, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are eligible for WIC.

*What food benefits can I get for my grandchild from the WIC Program?*

You will get a food package every month. There are different packages based on the age of the eligible children and the special diets that certain women and children need. WIC foods are high in protein, calcium, iron, and vitamins A and C.

The package has food items such as infant formula, milk, eggs, cheese, cereals, beans, peanut butter, and fruit or vegetable juices. Some states give you vouchers rather than the food items. You can use WIC vouchers to buy only certain foods. You can also get special infant formulas and other foods prescribed by a doctor or health professional. You can use WIC vouchers at most grocery stores.

*Can I apply for WIC for my grandchild?*

Yes. You can apply for WIC on behalf of eligible infants and children up to age 5 whom you are raising. You may not apply for yourself unless you are pregnant or recently gave birth.

To apply for WIC, you must go to an approved local agency that runs a WIC Program. To find the toll-free number to locate a local WIC Programs, call 703-305-2746 or, if you have a computer, check <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/contacts/statealpha.htm>. When you call the toll-free number, they will refer you to your local WIC Program. The local office will make an appointment for you to talk with someone about whether your grandchild is eligible.

*Do I have to have legal custody or guardianship of my grandchild to apply for WIC?*

No. The law does not require you to have legal custody or guardianship to apply for WIC for your grandchild. However, the program eligibility rules require a child to get a “nutrition risk” assessment, which includes a blood

test. Each state has its own laws about who can take a child for a blood test and receive the results of that test. Ask the local WIC office if your state requires you to have legal custody to get a blood test for your grandchild.

*What documents should I bring with me when I apply for WIC?*

When the local WIC agency makes your appointment, someone will tell you what documents to bring. The person who interviews you will need proof of your family income and your address. You should also have a copy of the child's birth certificate to show the child's age and if you can, bring your grandchild. Be sure to take whatever documents they ask for. The child's parent does not have to be with you.

*What happens after I apply for WIC for my grandchildren?*

The local WIC agency will send a letter telling you if your grandchildren qualify. It will tell you to expect to receive either a WIC food package or vouchers for WIC-approved food items.

The local program will explain what other services are available for nutrition education or health care. WIC services are often offered in county health departments, hospitals, health vans, community centers, schools, or other places in communities.

*How long can my grandchildren get WIC benefits?*

Your grandchildren can get WIC until their fifth birthday. Every six months, the program must certify that each child still qualifies. The local WIC office will check your family income and your grandchild's health condition. You will not qualify if your income goes above the guidelines or your grandchild is no longer nutritionally-at-risk.

*Can I do anything if my grandchild's application for WIC is denied?*

Each state must offer a hearing to people whose WIC applications are denied. If you get a letter saying that your grandchild does not qualify, call the local WIC agency and ask how you can appeal. You can have a friend or relative help you appeal.

*What happens if the WIC Program in my area is already full?*

Once a local WIC agency reaches its limit, people are served based on a priority list set by the federal government.

Infants who have serious medical problems and are nutritionally-at-risk are part of the first priority group. Next on the list are infants up to 6 months of age whose mothers were in WIC while pregnant or could have participated due to serious medical problems. The third group includes children up to age 5 who have serious medical problems and are nutritionally-at-risk. The next

two groups include infants and children up to age 5 who are nutritionally-at-risk because of dietary problems.

*Can my grandchildren get WIC if they come to live with me from another state?*

Yes, if they meet the eligibility rules. WIC requires applicants to live in the state where they receive the benefits. But you can apply for your grandchildren as soon as they come to live with you. You cannot start the application before the children come to live with you because the program staff needs to see them. The children must have their height and weight measured and their blood checked for anemia.

*What if my grandchildren now get WIC in another state, but are moving to live with me?*

Someone should tell the WIC office in the area where your grandchildren live that they are leaving that state. The children should get a special card showing that they receive WIC. The card will make it easier for them to enroll in WIC in your area. If there are no spaces available in your local WIC program, then this card can help place your grandchildren's names at the top of the waiting list. This means that the WIC agency will serve them first when it has more spaces.



*Can my grandchild continue to get WIC when she leaves her mother to come live with me?*

It depends on your income and your grandchild's health status. You will have to apply for her at the local WIC office so they can check your family income. Your grandchild will remain eligible as long as your income is within the guidelines and she is still nutritionally-at-risk. Remember that children only qualify until their fifth birthday.

*Can my grandchildren get WIC if they were not born in the U.S.?*

Yes. Children legally residing in the country can apply for WIC benefits without being citizens. It will not affect their ability to apply later for citizenship.

*Can I apply for WIC for my grandchildren if I am not a citizen?*

Yes, you can apply for them. Children who were born in the U.S. can get WIC benefits without affecting the immigration or naturalization status of other family members.

## **How Can My Grandchildren Benefit from the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs?**

*Why should I think about getting my grandchildren into the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs?*

The School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs provide free or low-cost nutritious meals. They help ensure that children are not hungry while at school so that they are ready to learn and to join in school activities. Over 14 million children get free or reduced-price meals every school day.

*What are the national School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs?*

The national School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs provide free or low-cost nutritious meals to all eligible students in the U.S. Children through age 18 can also get snacks if they attend after-school programs at participating sites.

Your grandchildren can qualify for these meals if they are income eligible and their schools participate in the program. Many public and nonprofit private schools serving kindergarten through grade 12 offer these meals. They are also available at residential child care programs.

*How much money can I have and still get my grandchildren into the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs?*

The eligibility rules for the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs count household income. This includes your income and that of any other people who live with you. Depending on how much income your household has, your grandchildren may be eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

Children can get free meals if the household income for four people is under about \$23,500 a year. Children who get food stamps or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (formerly known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children) or who attend a Head Start program automatically qualify for free meals.

Other low-income children pay a reduced price. Children can get reduced-priced meals if the household income for four people is under about \$33,500 a year. Reduced-price meals cost no more than 30 cents for breakfast and 40 cents for lunch.

The school will ask you to fill out a “Meal Benefit Form.” It has only a few questions and comes with instructions. You must list on the form all the income that comes into your household every month, including your own. You must report the earnings of each household member. You must also report payments that household members get from welfare, child support, pensions, retirement, or Social Security.

*How do I apply for the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs for my grandchildren?*

If you think that your grandchildren qualify for free or reduced-price meals, ask their teacher or the school principal for an application. The same application covers both breakfast and lunch.

If you have questions about how to complete the form, ask someone at your church or the local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to help you. See pages 34-35 about how to call your local AAA office.

*Do I need to have legal custody of my grandchildren to apply for these programs for them?*

No. You are not required to have legal custody. You can apply for your grandchildren as long as they live in your household. You may be asked if you are raising your grandchildren in your home, but you do not need to show any legal documents. You can simply say that you are their full-time caregiver. This means that you can fill out the “Meal Benefit Form” that schools use for the breakfast and lunch programs.

There is another way that you can get your grandchildren into the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs. If a school knows that your grandchildren are low income, a school official can fill out the application on their behalf. The official must speak with you or someone else who personally knows about the children’s situation.

*What kind of meals will my grandchildren get in these programs?*

Your grandchildren will get meals that meet federal nutritional standards. The programs are funded to provide good, nutritious meals so that children are ready to learn in school. Your grandchildren will get the same choice of meals and milk that is available to children who pay full price.

*Can my grandchildren eat with their friends if they are in the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs?*

Yes. Children who get free or reduced-price meals eat in the regular cafeteria with all the other students. They do not have to use special tokens or tickets to get their meals.

Schools across the country use different methods to know who participates in the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs. Many schools use a “personal identification number” (PIN) to protect the students’ identity. You may ask your grandchild’s school what privacy protections the students have.

*Can my grandchildren qualify for School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs if they were not born in the U.S.?*

Yes. Children who are living in this country legally can get free or reduced-price school breakfast and lunch without being citizens. Receiving this benefit will not affect their ability to apply later for citizenship. They can also get these meals without affecting the immigration or naturalization status of other family members.

*Can I apply for my grandchildren if I am not a citizen?*

Yes. The application includes no questions about your citizenship status. Children can get free or reduced-price school breakfast and lunch without affecting the immigration status of other family members.

## **What Help Is Available from the Summer Food Service Program?**

*What is the Summer Food Service Program?*

The Summer Food Service Program provides free meals and snacks to low-income children up to age 18 at summer food sites when school is not in session. The program can help stretch your food budget during the summer when your grandchildren are not getting breakfast, lunch, or snacks at school. It also offers free meals and snacks for individuals with disabilities over age 18 who attend school programs for people with physical or mental disabilities.

*How do I apply for the Summer Food Service Program for my grandchild?*

Your grandchild does not have to apply individually for the program. States approve locations for the Summer Food Service Program as either “open” or “enrolled” sites and all children at the eligible sites then qualify for the program.

“Open” sites are located in low-income neighborhoods where at least half of the children qualify for free and reduced-price school meals. In these cases, all children who come to the open site get free meals. There is no application to participate.

The other choice is an “enrolled” summer food site. These sites provide meals only to children who are enrolled in a program at the site. The sites are located in programs where at least half of the enrolled children qualify for free and reduced-price school meals. All enrolled children get free meals regardless of their income.

To participate in an enrolled site, your grandchild must be registered in the program. While you don’t need to apply for the Summer Food Service Program, the site may ask you to fill out a Summer Food “Meal Benefit Form,” which is very much like the School Breakfast and School Lunch application. If you have already applied to get free or reduced-price school meals for your grandchild, the site sponsor may be able to get that information from the school and you will not need to reapply.

If you have questions about how to complete the form for an enrolled site, ask someone at your place of worship or the local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) to help you. See pages 34-35 about how to call your local AAA office.

*How much money can I have and still get my grandchildren into the Summer Food Service Program?*

The Summer Food Service Program does not require individual children to qualify like the School Breakfast and School Lunch programs do. The Summer Food sites themselves must qualify. This means that your income does not matter at either an “open” site or an “enrolled” site.

*Do I have to have legal custody or guardianship of my grandchild to get him into the Summer Food Service Program?*

No. You do not need legal custody or guardianship to enroll your grandchild at either type of site.

*How do I find out what groups offer the Summer Food Service Program in my community?*

Local governments, school districts, or nonprofit groups may sponsor the Summer Food Service Program. Sites may include schools, parks, playgrounds, recreation centers, housing projects, migrant centers, Indian reservations, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, houses of worship, and other nonprofit groups. The sites often post flyers and advertise around the communities that they serve. Call the nutrition director for your local school district to find out if there is a Summer Food service site near you.



*Can my grandchildren qualify for the Summer Food Service Program if they were not born in the U.S.?*

Yes. Summer Food Service sites do not check children's immigration status. Children up to age 18 can get free meals and snacks through the program regardless of their immigration status. Participation will not affect the children's ability to apply later for citizenship.

*Can my grandchild only receive this help during the summer?*

No. The Summer Food Service Program runs during any school break that lasts 15 school days in a row. In most areas, this break is during the summer. But your area may have year-round schools. If so, there may be another time when there is a break long enough for your grandchildren to participate in the Summer Food Service Program.

## **What Is the Child and Adult Care Food Program?**

*What is the Child and Adult Care Food Program?*

The Child and Adult Care Food Program gives free meals and snacks to children who attend many child care centers, family child care homes, before- and after-school programs, and Head Start centers. It also provides meals and snacks at after-school programs for school-age children and youths up to age 19.

*Why might I consider getting my grandchildren into the Child and Adult Care Food Program?*

The program can help reduce your living expenses by providing extra help to feed your grandchildren. It can also help to enhance their healthy development. Every day, over 2.6 million children receive nutritious meals and snacks through the program.

*Who is eligible for the Child and Adult Care Food Program?*

Generally, only children who attend the programs approved to get these special funds are eligible to be served. Many child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start programs, after-school programs, recreation centers, and settlement houses get these special funds.

The ages of children served vary with the eligible program. Programs may offer after-school snacks to children up to age 19. In seven states (Delaware, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Pennsylvania, New York and Oregon), programs may also offer dinner.

*How do I apply for the Child and Adult Care Food Program for my grandchild?*

You do not have to apply for the Child and Adult Care Food Program. All children who attend programs participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program receive the free meals and snacks. No one checks each individual child's eligibility for the program.

*Do I have to have legal custody or guardianship of my grandchild for him to benefit from the Child and Adult Care Food Program?*

No. You do not have to have legal custody or guardianship of your grandchild for him to get the meals and snacks provided by the program. His eligibility depends on his being enrolled in a program that provides meals and snacks with help from the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

*Can my grandchildren benefit from the Child and Adult Care Food Program if they were not born in the U.S.?*

Yes. Children can get into the program without being citizens. Participation will not affect their ability to apply later for citizenship.

## **Resources for More Information about Federal Food Programs**

### *For Help Getting Food Locally*

You may want help feeding your grandchildren or ensuring that they receive the nutritious meals they need. Check where you worship about local food banks or other programs that have free food. Also ask staff at your local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). Sometimes they can take you to a local food bank to pick up food. You should also ask your grandchildren's teachers about free or reduced-price meals or snacks at the schools or child care programs that the children attend.

### *For Information Specifically for Family Caregivers*

The Older Americans Act funds the National Family Caregiver Support Program. It works with local Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) in every state to provide information to older caregivers about available services for their families. The Family Caregiver Support Program serves grandparents and other relative caregivers who are age 60 or older and caring for children under 18 years old. States must give priority to older individuals who are caring for people who have mental retardation and related developmental disabilities.

Almost every state has one or more AAA's to serve older residents and their families. Local AAA's are often listed in the city or county government section of the telephone

directory under “Aging” or “Social Services.” When you call the AAA office, ask about the National Family Caregiver Support Program in your state. You can also ask your State Unit on Aging about your state Caregiver Support Program. If you have a computer, go to <http://www.aoa.gov/aoa/pages/state.html> to find your State Unit on Aging. You can also get the numbers for your local AAA or State Unit on Aging by calling the Eldercare locator hotline at 1-800-677-1116.

### ***For Information about a Range of Federal Food Programs***

To learn more about federal food programs, call the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) or the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), a national nonprofit organization.

#### *U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)*

If you have a computer, you can find information about the federal food programs at <http://www.fns.usda.gov>.

For information about food stamps, you also can call USDA at 1-800-221-5689. There is no toll-free number to call about the other federal food programs, but you can write to:

USDA/FNS Public Information Staff  
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 819  
Alexandria, VA 22301

*Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)*

You can check FRAC's web site at <http://www.frac.org>, for useful information about federal food programs or write or call FRAC as noted below:

Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)  
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 450  
Washington, DC 20009  
202-986-2200  
202-986-2525 (FAX)

***For Information about Specific Federal Food Programs***

*Food Stamps*

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities  
820 First Street NE, Suite 510  
Washington, DC 20002  
202-408-1080  
202-408-1056 (Fax)  
<http://www.cbpp.org>

*WIC*

Ask your grandchild's doctor or health care provider about the WIC Program in your area. If you go to a health clinic, ask the nurse about it.

### *School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs*

Call your local school district and ask to speak with the director of nutrition or call your grandchild's teacher or school principal to ask about enrolling your grandchild in the School Breakfast and School Lunch Programs.

### *Summer Food Service Program for Children*

Call the local Department of Parks and Recreation and ask to speak with the director to find the Summer Food Service Programs for children. You should also check with day camps and nonprofit groups that have summer programs in your area for low-income children.

If you have a computer, you can get a local contact name for the program by checking <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Summer/Default.htm>.

### *Child and Adult Care Food Program*

You can find out what agency runs the Child and Adult Care Food Program in your state by checking <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/cacfp/cacfphome.htm>.

## **Additional Contacts for Grandparents and Other Relative Caregivers**

The following organizations may be useful to grandparents and other relative caregivers looking for additional information to help the children they are raising:



**AARP – Grandparent Information Center**

601 E Street NW  
Washington, DC 20049  
(202) 434-2296  
(202) 434-6466 Fax  
<http://www.aarp.org/confacts/programs/gic.html>

Provides an extensive range of services including a listing of local support groups for grandparents and other relatives, newsletters, and other useful publications.

**Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support**

1808 Eye Street NW, Fifth Floor  
Washington, DC 20006  
(202) 467-4441 or 1-888-295-6727  
(202) 467-4499 Fax  
<http://www.casey.org/cnc>

Provides comprehensive information about policies, programs, and practices for retaining, recruiting, and supporting foster, adoptive, and kinship care families.

**Children’s Defense Fund**

25 E Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
(202) 628-8787  
(202) 662-3550 Fax  
<http://www.childrensdefense.org>

Provides information and resources on issues facing kinship care providers inside and outside of the child welfare system, including information on federal legislation that helps kinship care families.

**Child Welfare League of America**

440 First Street NW, Third Floor  
Washington, DC 20001  
(202) 638-2952  
(202) 638-4004 Fax  
<http://www.cwla.org>

Offers resources and information on issues affecting grandparents and other caregivers raising children inside and outside of the child welfare system and sponsors an excellent national biennial conference on kinship care.

**Generations United**

122 C Street NW, Suite 820  
Washington, DC 20001  
(202) 638-1263  
(202) 638-7555 Fax  
<http://www.gu.org>

Offers information and advocacy materials for grandparents and other relative caregivers, including information on state and federal legislation, educational enrollment issues, subsidized guardianship, and support groups.

## **Children's Defense Fund's Publications for Grandparents and Other Relative Caregivers**

For a copy of these publications, call the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) at 202-662-3568, fax 202-662-3550, write to CDF, Child Welfare and Mental Health Division, 25 E Street NW, Washington, DC 20001, or log on to <http://www.childrensdefense.org>.

### ***The Grandparent's and Other Relative Caregiver's Guides***

CDF has created four helpful guides, written specifically for kinship caregivers, to answer their questions about important issues affecting the children in their care. The guides offer useful information on federal programs, eligibility requirements, and how to enroll the children they are raising. The four guides include:

- ***The Grandparent's and Other Relative Caregiver's Guide to Child Care and Early Childhood Education***
- ***The Grandparent's and Other Relative Caregiver's Guide to Food and Nutrition Programs for Children***
- ***The Grandparent's and Other Relative Caregiver's Guide to Health Insurance for Children***
- ***The Grandparent's and Other Relative Caregiver's Guide to Raising Children with Disabilities***

***Kinship Caregiver Leadership Training:  
A Guide to Advocacy for Children***

This training tool provides a curriculum for teaching kinship caregivers advanced advocacy methods to help them bring about change in their communities. The guide includes information on how to set goals; how to use the media and data to support a cause; how to build support at different levels, such as engaging the community and faith-based organizations; and fundraising basics.

***Kinship Care State Fact Sheets***

Many kinship caregivers are not aware of the services that their states may offer to them. CDF and seven other organizations created state-specific fact sheets so kinship caregivers can learn about their state's efforts to help children and the relatives who are raising them. These fact sheets talk about states' initiatives for offering services to kinship caregivers, the number of children living with relatives and in foster care, subsidies for legal guardians when they exist, and other laws that support kinship caregivers. Not all states offer the same services so kinship caregivers can look at what is provided in their own state as well as what may be available in other states.

***Resources to Help You Leave No Child Behind®***

***The State of Children in America's Union:  
A 2002 Action Guide to Leave No Child Behind®***

Learn how our nation can make more just choices to truly Leave No Child Behind® and to hold society accountable for protecting children. The guide includes state tables and how states rank with other states in protecting children.

***Hold My Hand: Prayers for Building a Movement to Leave No Child Behind®***

This is an inspiring collection of heartfelt prayers written by CDF President Marian Wright Edelman.

For other information about the Movement to Leave No Child Behind®, visit CDF's Web site at [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org).

## About the Children's Defense Fund

**T**he mission of the Children's Defense Fund is to Leave No Child Behind® and to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start*, and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

CDF provides a strong, effective voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, into trouble, drop out of school, or suffer family breakdown.

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations. We have never taken government funds.