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A **Se**COND CHANCE<sup>INC.</sup>



# National Kinship Review

News, Networking & Information for  
Kinship Care Professionals & Advocates



September is National Kinship Care Month!

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**25**

We've been celebrating kinship care  
every month for over 300 months!

Let's celebrate  
kinship caregiving families  
across the USA!



## DOES CASE MANAGEMENT = STRESS MANAGEMENT?

Quality delivery of kinship  
care services depends on it!



Human-services professionals often hear phrases like, “Care for yourself so you can care for others.” Delivering exemplary kinship care services means recognizing our role as caregivers for families in crisis. In the pursuit to care for others, however, kinship caseworkers and caregivers often rank their own needs as secondary. Child welfare is an environment that is always moving—it is constant and requires 100% of our attention—but caring for oneself does not distract from kinship care; it enhances it!

One way to foster mindfulness and stress management is through self-care (and guess what: it's Self-Care Awareness Month). Whether you are a kinship caregiver, caseworker or practitioner in the field, self-care is necessary for mental and emotional well-being when faced with the daily stressors that may arise in kinship care. More importantly, as the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#) explains, “taking care of yourself is a valid goal on its own, and it helps you support the people you love.”

### **The Importance of Self-Care for Kinship Caseworkers**

According to the [U.S. Administration for Children and Families](#) (ACF), compassion fatigue, or secondary traumatic stress (STS) disorder, is a set of observable reactions that naturally occurs within those who work with clients susceptible to trauma. These reactions mirror the symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and can include a combination of cognitive, behavioral, emotional and physical features. While human-services professionals overall are more vulnerable to developing this condition, there are various stressors unique to kinship care that may make its caseworkers particularly susceptible.

“The biggest stressors kinship caseworkers grapple with are managing the complex situations that kinship care brings and having the time necessary to

meet those complex needs,” explains clinical coordinator and supervisor in Child and Family Services at ASCI, Nico’Lee Biddle, LCSW. “Unique stressors include an increased risk of secondary trauma, as the family situations are much more involved than in traditional foster care.”

ACF explains that addressing STS should be done at the individual and organizational levels in ways that both prevent and treat staff affected. ASCI is dedicated to prioritizing wellness at an organizational level by providing opportunities for staff to engage in various in-house wellness activities and events, such as exercise classes like yoga and Zumba; informational sessions on topics such as emotional healing, the benefits of essential oils and financial health; workplace gatherings like ice cream socials and group lunches; and more. Additionally, ASCI staff are encouraged to practice wellness individually with dedicated time off on Wellness Wednesdays and Thursdays. By creating an environment in which self-care is encouraged, staff can work to overcome their natural tendency to internalize trauma, while at the same time prevent other negative responses to stress, such as burnout.

Timothy Gonzalez, LCSW, owner and lead clinician at A Wellness Place LLC and former Vice President of Child and Family Services at ASCI, explains why it is important for leaders to have strong relationships with their teams in order to better recognize the signs of burnout. “Being in a professional relationship with your team and attuned to each member will serve so well when sudden changes surface,” he says. “These changes can potentially be observed in ‘soft signs’ that affect mood, communication, energy level or overall spirit; or can be seen in ‘hard signs,’ like significant dips in outcome numbers and paperwork submissions, complaints from consumers, increased call-offs, etc.”

# 5 QUICK & EASY WAYS TO PRACTICE SELF-CARE AS A CASEWORKER

**Take out five minutes to one hour every day to preserve your mental, physical and emotional well-being!**

<b>EXERCISE.</b>	Exercise improves mental health by reducing anxiety, depression and negative mood and by improving self-esteem and cognitive function.
<b>CONNECT WITH NATURE.</b>	Studies show that regular, direct access to nature can increase self-esteem and resilience against stress and adversity, improve concentration, etc.
<b>JOURNAL EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE.</b>	Journaling can help you gain control of your emotions and improve your mental health.
<b>MAKE A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION THROUGH MEDITATION OR REFLECTION.</b>	Prayer and meditation are highly effective in lowering our reactivity to traumatic and negative events.
<b>PRACTICE DEEP BREATHING.</b>	One of the most significant benefits of deep breathing is reducing stress.

Practicing self-care is imperative for kinship caseworkers, as a lack thereof can ultimately have negative effects on their mental, physical and emotional well-being, as well as those of the families in their caseloads. Biddle offers that the inability to practice meaningful self-care leaves caseworkers with little to no energy to effectively engage with families. “A caseworker may become so enmeshed with the families they service that they are never able to recharge,” she states. “Casework is one of the most difficult jobs a person can have; it is emotional, it is complicated, and it is human. It is impossible for a person to work at 100 percent all the time, if they never give themselves the same 100 percent.”



Given the fact that caseworkers' schedules are intense and demanding, regularly practicing self-care can seem like an unattainable task. However, it is essential to prioritize and personalize self-care in order to squeeze it into one's daily routine. More importantly, Gonzalez emphasizes why self-care should reflect one's personal values and internal narrative: "Knowing [one]self is vital to knowing which self-care practice(s) is most compatible."

## **The Importance of Self-Care for Kinship Caregivers**

Dr. Marlynn Wei, contributing editor at [Harvard Health Publishing](#), describes caregiver burnout as an example of how repeated exposure to stress can harm mental and physical health. "Chronic stress triggers a release of stress hormones in the body, which can lead to exhaustion, irritability, a weakened immune system, digestive distress, headaches, pains and weight gain," she explains.

Additionally, the unexpected and prompt transition an individual must make when agreeing to become a child's kinship caregiver can trigger multiple forms of stress and uncertainty.

"One of the biggest stressors for kinship caregivers is lack of time," says Lydia Cooper, Family and Community Engagement (FACE) trainer at ASCI. "Training, doctor appointments, paperwork, home visits ... that causes a lot of pressure. In addition to that there is the sudden realization that someone you love is in such bad shape that their children have been removed from them and the children may have been harmed. These emotional stressors that lie beneath the organizational pressures of the child welfare process often get shunted aside or buried, but they are always there," she adds.

As it is for their caseworkers, self-care is also crucial for kinship caregivers, as it serves as a reasonable coping mechanism for stress. Cooper explains that the stress a caregiver experiences can be shared with the children in their care. "Children learn by example and imitation," she says. "An unhappy adult may create all kinds of negative emotions in a child: fear, anxiety, guilt, etc."

ASCI values the health and wellness of its kinship caregivers and seeks to relieve some of their stress by providing cost-free supports, such as a Kinship Closet (a clothing bank), community garden, legal clinic, vision and dental clinics, support groups and in-home clinical services, to name a few. But while these free services may offset some of a caregiver's many burdens, they cannot replace

self-care.

According to Wei, one can practice self-care and purposefully activate the relaxation response to stress through mind-body practices like yoga, tai chi, meditation and deep-relaxation techniques.



## 5 TIPS TO MAKE SELF-CARE A DAILY PRACTICE AS A KINSHIP CAREGIVER

**Cooper insists on a minimum of five minutes per day. Every. Day.**

### MAKE TIME.

Choose a time you already know is not a busy time for the kids, in the morning or right after the children go to bed. If you do it at the same time every day, it will become a habit.

### VENT TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST.

Talking about your problems without censoring any of the sensitive details can be liberating and cathartic.

### JOURNAL YOUR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS.

Journaling can help you gain control of your emotions and improve your mental health.

### FIND SECLUSION.

Do something by yourself, like praying, playing games on your phone, going on social media sites or enjoying coffee at the local café.

### LAUGH.

According to helpguide.org, laughter has been clinically proven to lower blood pressure, burn calories, boost your immune system, relax muscles and even help you live longer.

While self-care is imperative for single caregivers, it is equally important that caregivers in committed relationships prioritize their time in order to maintain self-care. "Committed couples should plan a few minutes a day for a joint relaxation activity," Cooper suggests. "As always, the best ideas come from the caregivers

themselves. We have one couple that does self-care for only 30 seconds per day! They work different schedules, so every day as they meet each other coming and going, they stop and share a 30-second hug. For 30 seconds, they share their plans for the day and tell each other how much they love each other."

Kinship care not only results in better outcomes for children in out-of-home care, but also provides a rewarding experience for both caregivers and caseworkers. That said, self-care must be an essential component of daily life to mitigate the stress that can arise from unexpected situations, a lack of time, lengthy processes, and primary and secondary exposure to trauma, which can negatively impact one's ability to properly care for and serve the children to whom we are all so dedicated.

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FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA

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## **NORTHERN VIRGINIA REGIONAL KINSHIP SYMPOSIUM**

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On September 16, retired Judge Cheryl Allen along with ASCI's Jay Kadash, Davida Allen and Jasmine Dukes attended the Northern Virginia Regional Kinship Symposium to present on "The Legal Evolution of Kinship Care: Highlighting Lived Experiences." ASCI was engaged to oversee the development of kinship-focused learning for the day. Judge Allen opened the symposium with a heartfelt keynote address to discuss the challenges faced by children in care.

The discussion was an opportunity to highlight the environmental scan and hear from the region's kinship caregivers. The audience appreciated the honest dialogue and guidance on how to engage focused kinship relationships. Thank you, Judge Allen and team for your important efforts.





# ASCI Staff Celebrate Their Grandparents

GRANDPARENTS DAY, SEPTEMBER 6



Left photo: Lydia Cooper poses with her great-grandchildren Tora Mitchell, Tyrah Mitchell-Cooper and Tatiana Mitchell. Lydia is a Family and Community Engagement Trainer at ASCI's Philadelphia office.



Right photo: Kennice Hudson poses with her son, Virgil McClendon, and grandson, Elijah McClendon. Kennice is a Kinship Navigator Caseworker at ASCI's Pittsburgh office.





Left photo: Tamia Mitchell playing with her granddaughter, Xea Rodgers. Tamia is the Chief of Staff in ASCI's Pittsburgh office.

Right photo: Tamia Mitchell kissing her grandson Elijah St. Jean.



Left photo: Donald and Jean Uber happily sitting with their grandson, David Uber. Donald is an accountant in ASCI's Pittsburgh office.

Right photo: James Weems' son, Jaden Weems, and daughter, Maranda Weems, posing with their grandmother, Gail Weems. James is an FST Director in ASCI's Pittsburgh office.





Left photo: Baby Sha'Ri Hunt sitting with her grandmother, Lavana "Lee" Foster. Sha'Ri is a CFS Caseworker in ASCI's Pittsburgh office.

Right photo: Baby Angelique Rodgers sitting with her father, Andre Mitchell, and her grandmother, Thelma Mitchell. Angelique is the Manager of Content Marketing & Public Relations in ASCI's Pittsburgh office.



Left photo: This photo shows four generations! From left to right: Jazmine Lindsay, Skylar Jenkins with her great-grandmother Diane Wolford and grandmother Candeese Lindsay. Jazmine is an FST worker and Candeese is a Child and Family Services Supervisor II in ASCI's Pittsburgh office.

Right photo: Four more generations! Left to right: Regina Brown, grandmother Sharon Shedrick, Gi'Ahnna Brown-Young, Kennice Hudson, Vania McClendon and great-grandmother Frances Jackson. Sharon is a Child and Family Services assistant, Kennice is a Kinship Navigator Caseworker and Vania is the Communications assistant in ASCI's Pittsburgh office.



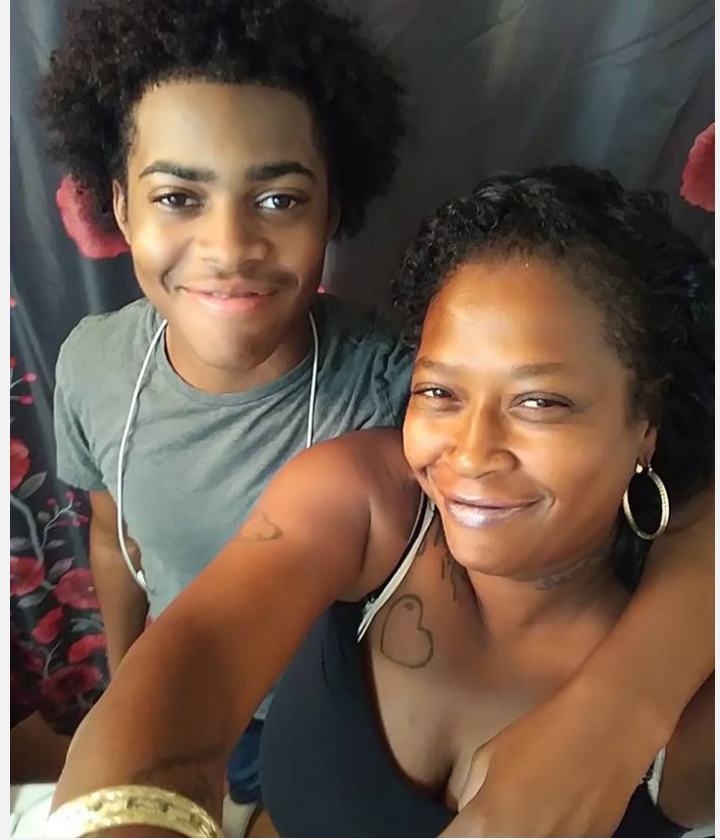
Left photo: Mikka Jones' mother Karen Franklin pictured with her grandson Emmanuel Jones. Mikka is the administrative assistant in Records Management and Intake at ASCI's Pittsburgh office.

Right photo: Davida Allen's son Zion Allen pictured with his great-grandmother, Ms. Lee Lane. Davida is Senior Director I of Kinship Navigation and National Navigation Expansion, while Ms. Lane is a childcare worker for Family and Community Engagement in ASCI's Pittsburgh office.





Left photo: Deborah Williams pictured with her granddaughter, Sydney Tomman. Deborah is a Family Service Transportation Supervisor at ASCI's Pittsburgh office.



Right photo: Nakeya Berry's son, Kweli Berry, pictured with his grandmother, Dionne Berry. Nakeya is a Permanency Supervisor at ASCI's Philadelphia office.



Left photo: Bonita Flanagan holding her newborn grandson, Jaevon Jones. Bonita is the Executive Assistant to the EVP of Child and Family Services in ASCI's Pittsburgh office.



Right photo: Aayesha Bell's nephew, Zaiden Story, with his Mom-Mom, Lela Taylor. Aayesha is the Billing Specialist in ASCI's Philadelphia office.

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