

OPERATOR: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time, all participants are in listen-only mode. After the presentation, we will conduct the question-and-answer session. To ask a question, please press star and then one. I'd like to inform all parties that today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time. I would now like to turn the conference over to your host, Ms. Sonya Begay. You may begin.

SONYA BEGAY: Hello. Good afternoon and good morning to you. I don't know your time zone. [Unintelligible], my name is Sonya Begay, and I'm an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation. [Speaking Navajo]. I'm one of the advisory council members for the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, or the SGRG-

SONYA BEGAY: I'm getting some feed-

OPERATOR: Yeah, Sonya, that's coming from your line. If you could, again, check the audio in your Webex and make sure that the audio is disconnected in your Webex and that your [unintelligible] is connected with the-

SONYA BEGAY: Okay. I'm- sorry, I think it's okay now. I'm sorry.

OPERATOR: That's okay.

SONYA BEGAY: Okay. And now I'll continue. I am one of the advisory council members for the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, or the SGRG. Today I'll be talking about the SGRG, which has become a great component for all grandparents raising their grandchildren and caregivers. Lastly, I will discuss some of the challenges grandparents raising grandchildren and caregivers endure during the COVID-19 pandemic. Next slide, please.

The Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act, or the SGRG, was signed into law on July 7th, 2018 to address the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren and caregivers. One of the parameters of this law was to establish a federal advisory council to support the grandparents and other relatives raising children. The advisory council includes various federal agencies and grandparents as parents or caregivers, which will serve for the duration of three years. Next slide.

The responsibilities of the council will identify, promote- [audio cuts out]- and disseminate information publicly. It will include information, resources, and best practices available to assist grandparents and other relatives raising children in their care. This will be inclusive of the needs of grandparents and other relatives raising children that are affected by the opiate crisis. Also, the advisory council must ensure the needs of Native American grandparents are addressed under the SGRG Act.

Later, a report to Congress will be submitted on the best practices, resources, and other information for families, as well as gaps in services, to meet these families' needs. But most importantly, due to the emergency circumstances of the pandemic that is affecting every household, a COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness Resource Guide has been established to meet the concerns of households with grandparents raising grandchildren and caregivers. Next slide, please.

The development of this resource guide brought many challenges and barriers to light that has affected our grandparents and other caregivers. Due to the remoteness of some of the households in rural areas and within the reservations, there's a concern that transportation needs, obtaining groceries and medical prescriptions, school supplies that pertain to their grandchildren within their care, and Internet services for children's schoolwork.

An example of this is a grandparent raising a five-year-old in one of the villages of Alaska. There is great difficulty for this family to pay any services due to the quarantine and prevented this household to get the basic necessities met and traveling to the clinic to get required medical prescriptions. It took weeks for services to be available, just to get someone to deliver anything to this family. There are some areas that still do not have electricity, indoor plumbing, and running water in their homes, or they still live in a traditional lifestyle.

Many of these households still have to haul water to their residences. Many of these grandparents and/or caregivers might not have the physical capability to haul water, especially when someone gets sick with the COVID-19 virus. The picture provided on this slide is a water trough that my relatives use as a water source for their livestock. But just on the other side of this trough is a pump that is used for household needs. Large water tanks are filled to capacity and hauled back to their homes.

Also, with limited income, the majority of these households do not receive their social security or disability checks until the first of the month. This prevents the ability to purchase hand sanitizers, soap, and even food, especially when they have to drive to the closest store, which may be more than an hour away. This brings up the additional expense of gas and finding someone to provide reliable transportation to the store. But, unfortunately, within this time, they could go through all of this trouble and expense only to find that the store does not have the necessities that they need to try combat this virus.

Another thing that comes up is overcoming the overcrowding within a household with multiple generations of family members living in a small- maybe it's one small house. It presents a problem if someone gets ill with the virus. The difficulties trying to isolate that sick individual, provide hygiene, do cleaning and disinfecting, the whole house becomes utter chaos. But most importantly, [unintelligible] having access to crucial information for grandparents and/or caregivers can be trying. There are still elders who speak their traditional language.

Most might not have cell phones, so social media presents a problem for up-to-date information. Usually, if they do have televisions, there's no access to local news for the pandemic crisis. There's households that are uniformed and maybe just scared. They also do not recognize the symptoms of a family member who becomes ill with this virus. There has to be a network system that gives information on what communities, reservations, and travel within these areas that provides structured policies and how they will be enforced.

In closing, I wanted to summarize- oh, sorry, next slide please. In closing, I'd like to summarize just what the SGRG does, and I think we've done a great job, especially with this pandemic information I just gave you. We basically will be identifying, promoting, coordinate and disseminate to the public information, resources, and best practices available to help grandparents and other older relatives.

We also try to meet the health- meet the needs and the health and nutritional and educational and other needs of the children that are in care. And, lastly, to maintain our own physical and mental and emotional wellbeing for both grandparents, parents, caregivers and

children. I thank you very much for allowing me to speak with you. Now I will hand it over to Mary Weston and Jackie Edwards. Thank you.

MARY WESTON: Next slide, please. So good afternoon, everyone. We're looking forward to sharing some back-to-school tips with you for grandparents raising grandchildren. And Jackie is going to start us out. Next slide, please.

JACKIE EDWARDS: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jackie Edwards. I'm the Family Caregiver Support Program coordinator with the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Area Agency on Aging, Region 8. And we are looking at back-to-school tips for grandparents raising grandchildren in particular in kind of a two-prong sense, where there are those children going back to school in the traditional sense, in the physical classroom, and then there are those who are going to be attending online virtual classes.

So this first slide that you see in front of you is the children who are attending school in the traditional sense. So my first bullet here is to check in with your child every day before bringing them to school to assess for illness, you know, check fever, make sure they don't have a sore throat, cough, stomachache, fatigue, all of the general symptoms. And it's good to identify a point person at their school to contact if an illness does occur and to be familiar with the location of the COVID-19 testing site, if that's necessary.

Flu vaccinations are strongly encouraged at this time because it's just unknown, if catching both COVID-19 and the flu, what that could happen. So it's best to- there has been a strong encouragement to receive the flu vaccine in particular for this year. And be familiar with your school's plan on how they will handle any positive cases that might happen.

My second bullet, discuss safety precautions they must take while at school. This includes frequent washing hands, wearing masks, social distancing, avoid sharing objects, sanitize the items before use, and discuss how classroom setups will be, how it's going to be different for safety reasons. Number three, develop a family safety plan. It's good to consider establishing a family plan to ensure the safety of everyone in the household, if a family member is tested positive. Is somebody going to quarantine in the back room or what is that going to look like exactly?

Number four, plan for school closures. In case school closes again, as we've seen it do a number of times this year, prepare yourself. If you're still working, what is your work schedule going to look like? Is there a need to study for your child and yourself? And, of course, you may need to step in to assist with the teaching lesson and have a place for your child to complete schoolwork, if necessary.

Transportation to and from school. Go over the rules with your child if they take the bus or carpool and discuss the need to social distance, which likely means sitting one space from another- er, having one space in between them and the other children and to wear a mask. And if a child receives additional services, like an IEP, which is an Individualized Education Plan, ask how the school plans to continue the service. And this also includes other services, like occupational/physical therapy, behavioral health counseling.

And, next, wash reusable cloth face coverings and label them, if possible. Ensure they know the proper way to wear their mask. And be sure to role model by also wearing your mask. And last bullet is talk with your child about their mental and social functioning. Because

everything is so drastically different this year, it's that much more imperative to check in with your child on how school is going and how they're faring with all these changes.

Watch for behavioral changes, like excessive worrying, frequent crying, irritability, sleep or eating pattern disruptions. Anything outside of the norm, check if your school's mental health services are available due to the disruption. And some schools have options like mindfulness meditation, so it's good to check in with that. And be active with the Parent-Teacher Association or any other teacher meetings when possible. Next slide, please.

MARY WESTON: Next, we're going to focus on back-to-school virtually. As a grandparent helping to raise a grandson in our home, I am finding that we are absolutely adjusting to a new normal. We're experiencing lots of changes adjusting to the new online learning environment. This new way of learning is challenging at times, but it's actually exciting. It's providing some really great opportunities to learn new skills and techniques for us as grandparents and our grandchildren.

But it's important for us, as grandparents, to keep in mind that we do not have to have all the answers to everything. We don't always know how to use the new technology at times or perhaps how to help with the new ways of doing math and other subjects. The good news is, there is help available. We've found that asking for help from teachers, many of the teachers will provide help before and after school. They've been very helpful.

And for those of you that have access to online resources, there are many available, such as spellcheck, free tutorial programs, tutoring websites, libraries can actually provide free access to digital books and magazines. Check in with the schools to find out about homework helpline or free tutoring. And some grandparents that we've actually worked with here in Arizona are getting together to form support groups to share resources and help each other. AARP actually has some great information about virtual learning, and we have shared their website with you on our resource page.

Mental health is important for grandparents as well as kids. You need to take care of yourself, and if you need help, get some help by talking with friends, family, or professionals in the community. It's important to be aware of signs of stress and anxiety in the children. They may seem more irritable at times or perhaps withdrawn. Talk with them about how they are feeling about school, COVID, and what else is going on in their minds and in their lives.

Keep routines in place. Children do well with structure. Post your grandchild's schedule where they can actually see it daily or consider using a timer or a planner to help them keep focused on their schedule. And get moving. It's important for all of us to be active- physically active indoors or outdoors. Indoors or outdoor playtime is important for the children. Try to plan for at least 60 to 90 minutes of physical activity a day. And this can be even in the form of online workouts or just dancing to the music from the radio or the TV indoors. And that includes grandparents too. We need to get moving and be active.

Socialization is a challenge, but it's also very important during this time of COVID. Older children may already be interacting with friends through their phones or video chats, but it's also important to remember to include the younger children in conversations with their friends or other family members by phones or video chat. And it's important for grandparents and grandchildren to have some breaks and some relaxation time during the day. Quiet activities

like reading, storytelling, puzzles, or checkers might be a really good way to wind down and relax. Next slide, please.

JACKIE EDWARDS: Now Mary and I have compiled a list of tips for success. And this is if they are attending school in the traditional sense or online. The first thing, prepare your grandchildren for school, which means make sure they go to school fed and well-rested. Limit outside activities to avoid burnout. Children can only do so much, so if they have too many extracurricular activities, they may be too tired to do homework.

Take time to read. Children are much more likely to read if adults around them read. Take your grandkids to the library and bring home some books for them and yourself and read aloud together. Ask the children what the book was about and why the characters acted the way they did. Get them involved in what they read. Encourage sharing. Ask your grandchildren about school. Listen closely and respond with empathy when things aren't going well.

This interaction fosters better students and stronger relationships. Monitor screen time and all media. Limit the amount of hours that the television and video game devices are on. Choose TV shows and find some to watch together and use it as an opportunity to perhaps share some family values. Next slide.

MARY WESTON: It's important to create an environment that encourages learning. You want to take into account, does your grandchild need a quiet space for learning away from distractions, or will they do better if they have closer supervision and interaction with others? Either way, it's important for them to have a designated special area to work in. If a separate desk or table isn't available, you can use part of a dining room table or a kitchen table or even a folding table as a desk. Check with the school for a list of supplies that will be needed.

Some supplies to have on hand if possible are paper, pencils, tape, pencil sharpeners, paperclips, rulers, calculators. And some optional items could be a white board to write on with markers or bulletin boards. And you don't have to buy- go out and buy a new bulletin board. You can make one. You can make them rather cheaply out of foam board instead of corkboard, using material that you might have at home or wrapping paper as a cover. And you can involve your grandchildren with helping.

Storage options can be bins, drawers that you have on hand, binders, notebooks, or a box for pencils, pens, and markers to keep them organized. For virtual learning, it is going to be important to have a laptop or tablet for children to use, if possible. Check with their school to see if these items are available for use. Many of the schools are providing either laptops or tablets for the children. Some optional items would be headphones and blue-light glasses. That was new for me to learn about, but good things to know about.

Headphones with built-in microphones don't have to be expensive, but they can really help with concentration on study and blocking outside noise. These will help during classes with Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and other video conferencing. And the blue-light glasses are really good to know about. They can help with exposure to blue light from the computers, which they actually say can interrupt sleep patterns at nighttime and certainly put stress on the eyes. Next slide, please.

JACKIE EDWARDS: Be a role model for your grandchildren. When your children see you reading or taking classes, they get the message that learning is important. And just remember, reading, writing, and math are important skills, but other skills like setting priorities, time management, and skills to solve problems also impact children's ability to succeed in school and life. So always role model that.

Talk about homework. Help the children manage homework by breaking it into smaller segments. Help them to learn how to pace their work. Check homework for completeness, but don't do the assignment for them. Complete one or two examples together and let them do the rest. Then, if they don't do their homework, they won't do well on tests and assignments, which they'll learn. Have the grandchildren write down the name and phone number of one student in each class to call for help or missed class notes.

And the last bullet here is support the teachers, which I think is so important. If you think teachers are assigning too much homework or there's an issue that you need to discuss with a teacher, make sure to make an appointment to discuss the matter privately without the children present. Sometimes the children can pick up the way that you're speaking to or treating the teacher, and it might encourage them to question the teacher's authority. And it's possible that that can lead to discipline problems down the road. Next slide.

MARY WESTON: Use positive reinforcement for good behavior. Catch them doing good work and give praise or rewards, small daily or weekly rewards for good behavior and work. A good resource for using positive reinforcement is the book, *Catch Them Being Good: A Guide to Positive Parenting* by Jody Robin Kussin. Grandparents should keep a daily list of activities on a calendar so that you can keep up with assignments or projects that are due. You can have your grandchildren use a planner for homework assignments and projects and review those completed assignments with them to see if they're having any challenges doing the work and if the work has been completed.

And have your grandchild use the time- a timer to track their own class schedule, the time spent on their homework, or reading time. It helps to keep them on track, and it helps to make them more independent in organizing and sustaining their schedule. And at the end of each day, put something positive in play. Perhaps checking with them, asking them about something that they liked learning today. That can be a wonderful ending to their day and your day. Next slide, please.

JACKIE EDWARDS: It's important to interweave your culture into their daily lessons as well, so think about ways to culturally connect with them, to complement their scholastic learning. And of course this really varies from tribe to tribe. Some examples include teaching a song or a story in your language, working together on knitting, pottery or beading, discuss and share a cultural history lesson or a traditional game, preparing a cultural dish together, or introducing them to a skill, such as gardening. And to your right, you'll see a wonderful picture that Sonya gave us on her granddaughters learning to garden, which is a great example of this. Next slide.

MARY WESTON: We wanted to remind everyone and share with everyone that National Grandparents Day is coming up. It's Sunday, September 12th, and we want to take this

opportunity from all of us to thank you for all that you do each and every day for your grandchildren. Next slide, please.

We have a list of resources for you to check out. And, as I mentioned before, AARP, *A Guide to Helping Students Succeed with Virtual Education* is listed. There's also some other really good resources that we hope you'll take time to look into. We've also listed a resource in the National and Native American Caregiver Support Programs. The National Resource Center on Native American Aging is a wonderful resource. And your tribal elderly or senior centers, of course, or your nearest support system, and also Area Agencies on Aging in your area. Next slide, please.

We've listed our sources that we've used for our information today and for our presentation. And we just want to mention that there's always wonderful information through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC. And they actually have Back-to-School Planning Checklist to guide parents, guardians, and caregivers. Please check those out online. They are very detailed and very helpful. And we want to thank you for your attention and your participation with all three of us today. We can open it up for questions at this time.

OPERATOR: Thank you. We will now begin the question-and-answer session. If you would like to ask a question, please press star-one. Please unmute your phone and record your name slowly and clearly when prompted. Your name is required to introduce your question. To cancel your request, please press star-two. Once again, to ask a question, please press star-one. Record your name clearly when prompted. To cancel your request, please press star-two.

LAURA STEVENSON: We did have a question on the chat from Heather Radzikowski. She's wondering if they'll be able to have a copy of the resource list.

MARY WESTON: Yes. There will be a copy of the resource list with the slides, and the sources that we used today. And that will be on Older Indians- the Older Indians website, .org website. And that will be posted in approximately two weeks. And also, Laura, I believe that you mentioned if anyone is interested in getting a copy sooner, they can contact you. Jackie and I also have our information here, and our emails, and we'd be glad to share that with you also.

LAURA STEVENSON: Yes, I'll put my email address in the chat right now too. Thanks.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our first question from the phone line comes from Jasmine. Jasmine, your line is now open.

JASMINE APLAN: Hey! This is Jasmine Aplan from ACL. And first of all, I wanted to thank our presenters for doing such an excellent job. I felt like I learned so much. So like, first of all, thank you so much for your help. I also just wanted to kind of- more of than a question, I just kind of wanted to make a comment. As far as like looping this into Title VI, as part of your Title VI Grant award, the Part C funds can actually be used for some of these supplies that our lovely presenters alluded to.

So we have this Part C caregiver bucket of money, and grandparents raising grandchildren are part of that caregiver bucket. So, you know, when we're talking about that

kind of supplies, you know, school supplies and clothing and things like that, we've had requests to use Title VI dollars to really support our grandparents raising their grandchildren. And so I just kind of wanted to put that out there as far as what folks were thinking about to loop it into your Title VI program. But more, first and foremost, I just wanted to thank our presenters for doing an excellent job today.

MARY WESTON: Thank you.

JACKIE EDWARDS: I'd also like to mention, to add onto that, thank you for mentioning, we do purchase back-to-school supplies for some of the tribes in Arizona. We've been getting into a routine of doing that every year. So that's been extremely helpful to the grandparents raising grandchildren.

We get the caregiver coordinators or the program managers to give us an idea of how many grandparents are in their community, and we try to accommodate that by purchasing that amount of supplies, like backpacks, binders, notebooks, anything really practical that they use. So that's an example of how you could use Title VI funding.

MARY WESTON: And this is Mary Weston. I also want to mention, we actually mentioned during the presentation about grandparents starting support groups, and we have heard from grandparents in Arizona, from the tribes we work with, that this is helping them quite a bit to answer questions, to work together, to find resources, to just talk about their challenges, the days that are challenging for them, and dealing with their stress.

And so please think about starting a support group in your area. It could be done through conference calls and by phone. And if you are a staff in a senior center and other agencies that are working with elders in your community, please think about helping them to form a support group and providing resources for it. It could be very helpful during this time.

LAURA STEVENSON: We do have a question. This can be for grantees or for speakers, I guess, if you wanted to talk about it, what do you find are the most challenging areas for grandparents raising grandchildren, with children returning to school during COVID-19, especially for virtual education.

JACKIE EDWARDS: Certainly I would say the gap with technology. I- that's a big one in terms of some of the grandchildren not having access to that technology to begin with, and that means equipment or/and Internet connection. And then, on top of that, the expectation for them to take over some of the teaching lessons. So that's why it's that much more important, I think, that we're reaching out and checking in with the grandparents raising grandchildren to assist as much as we can, now more than ever.

LAURA STEVENSON: An additional question. How has your household changed to accommodate the needs of your grandchild's virtual learning? I don't know if the speakers want to comment on that. We can also open that up for Title VI grantees as well.

MARY WESTON: Sure. This is Mary Weston. Our household has- in our home- has changed in many ways. As I mentioned before, certainly the schedules have changed to accommodate the new schedule of school being in place and also online learning. And the arrangement of our house has changed in some ways, making sure that our grandson has a good place for him to concentrate and do his studies.

And then I think another thing that's happened, I mentioned before, there's lots of positives, is we're all working together in this new environment and learning how to use the new technology and then learning how to- each of us using our strengths to help in various areas that he's studying in school.

OPERATOR: Once again, to ask a question on the phone line, please press star-one, record your name clearly when prompted. To cancel your request, please press star-two. At this time, speakers, we don't have any questions on queue.

MARY WESTON: Okay. Thank you. We want to thank-

JACKIE EDWARDS: Thank you very much-

MARY WESTON: -thank everyone for joining us today.

OPERATOR: That concludes today's conference. Thank you all for participating. If you are a speaker, please stay on the line for the post-conference. If you are a participant, you may now disconnect.