

## Advocate Tip Sheet #3

# Kinship Care & 3SquaresVT Benefits

### What is kinship care?

Kinship care is when an adult cares for a child under the age of 18, either on a temporary or permanent basis. The adult is most often a grandparent, but can also be an aunt, uncle, sibling or cousin. It can also be a non-relative adult who has a relationship or family-like bond with the child and/or family. Kinship care refers to both informal and formal arrangements (i.e. legal guardianship, kinship foster care, and adoption). A kinship care situation can happen when the parents are deceased, or separated from their children for long periods of time - either by choice or by circumstance - and unwilling or unable to provide their children with safe, appropriate care.

### What are the kinds of kinship care arrangements in Vermont?

1. Informal arrangement
2. Legal guardianship through probate court
3. Legal custody through family court
4. State foster care
5. Permanent guardianship through family court
6. Adoption

For more information about various types of care arrangements, see the *Vermont Resource Guide for Relatives Caring for Children* at [bit.ly/3OBiSDO](https://bit.ly/3OBiSDO).

You can also visit [www.vermontkinasparents.org](http://www.vermontkinasparents.org) or call (802) 871-5104.

### How does each kind of kinship care arrangement impact 3SquaresVT household composition and who claims the child as part of their household?

Children under age 18 (excluding foster children) who live with and are under parental control of someone who is not their parent are required to be in the 3SquaresVT household of that adult. Inclusion or exclusion of a foster child in the 3SquaresVT household is the choice of the 3SquaresVT head-of-household. Children are considered to be under parental control if the children are financially or otherwise dependent on a member of the household. Every situation is unique, you will have to discuss yours with a benefit specialist when applying for 3SquaresVT.

### Does the age of the child or caregiver matter?

Parent(s) living with their natural, adopted or stepchildren under the age 22 are considered mandatory household members. In kinship arrangements that are not an adoption, these children would not be mandatory unless under age 18. However, if they purchase and prepare meals together they would still be required to be in the same 3SquaresVT household.

If a caregiver is age 60 or older, they do not face an income test to be eligible for 3SquaresVT. In addition, they may deduct out-of-pocket medical expenses over \$35 a month, which may help to increase the household's 3SquaresVT benefit. People with disabilities, including adults and children, may also deduct medical expenses.

**If a caregiver is sharing custody of a child with a parent or other family member who lives in a different household, who can claim the child as part of their 3SquaresVT household?**

A person can only participate in one household; the child would be in the household where the majority of meals are eaten. If it is a 50-50 custody split, the person who applies first and is eligible can claim the children in their 3SquaresVT household.

**How does receipt of 3SquaresVT impact eligibility for other types of benefits, such as Section 8, Reach Up Child Only Grants, SSI, and Social Security?**

Receipt of 3SquaresVT benefits does **not** affect any of these benefits.

**If a kin is providing meals to their relative children while the children’s caregiver is working or out of town for the day/ weekend/afternoon, is there a provision to allow an increased 3SquaresVT benefit, in consideration of the meals provided to children as nonhousehold members?**

Unfortunately, no. This is an example of how difficult it is to make ends meet even on a maximum benefit. Many variables challenge households, including regular visitors who come for meals.

**Why are some kinship caregivers reluctant to apply for 3SquaresVT and/or claim children as part of their household? ?**

- Worry that they will make the parents (who may be claiming the children) angry, which could affect the caregiving relationship.
- Worry that getting 3SquaresVT will somehow negatively impact other benefits they may receive.
- Confusion or misinformation about the application process.
- Misperception that they will be taking benefits away from someone else who needs them.
- Embarrassed to ask for help or get government assistance.



**Key outreach messages to share with eligible kinship caregivers?**

- 3SquaresVT is a nutrition program that can give you more money to buy food for the children in your care. You can put more nourishing meals on the table, and free up money for other things.
- Most households receive benefits on an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which looks and acts just like a debit card, making it more efficient and anonymous than the old “food stamps.”
- The benefits do not impact your eligibility for other programs such as Section 8.
- If you are eligible for 3SquaresVT, you are likely eligible for other programs such as Reach Up or fuel assistance.
- There are enough benefits for everyone who is eligible. You are not taking away from others. In fact, you are helping your local economy when you spend your benefits.

**What other resources can I recommend to kinship caregivers?**

- There are many benefit programs offered by the Department for Children and Families that kinship caregivers and their children may be eligible for. Find more information about programs at: <http://dcf.vermont.gov/>
- For more resources and connections to services dial **2-1-1**, a confidential, toll-free in Vermont information and referral service, available 24/7. If over 60, call the HelpLine at **1-800-642-5119**.