

SUMMER IS COMING



Summer is almost here and while that may mean more time together, it can also signal the start of a challenging season for the children in your care. This month, we focus on how the end of the school year can trigger ACE-related behaviors, and what you can do to support your grandchild through the transition.

UNDERSTANDING ACES: A QUICK REFRESHER

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood including abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, and exposure to violence or substance use. Research consistently shows that the more ACEs a child has experienced, the greater the risk for emotional, behavioral, and physical health challenges.

For children in kinship care, ACE scores are often elevated. Many have experienced multiple forms of trauma before coming to live with grandparents or other relatives. These experiences do not simply fade with time they live in the body and the nervous system, and they can resurface when a child feels stressed, uncertain, or unsafe.

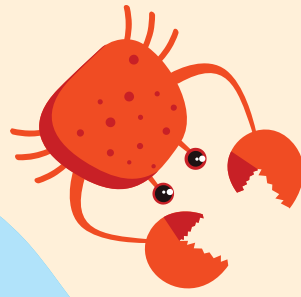
WHY THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR CAN BE A TRIGGER

To many children, the end of the school year sounds like a relief. But for children with significant ACEs, it can feel like the opposite. Here's why:

Loss of Structure and Routine

School provides a predictable daily rhythm something children who have experienced trauma rely on heavily. When that structure disappears, the nervous system can interpret the change as a threat, even when nothing "bad" is happening. You may notice increased irritability, sleep disruptions, or difficulty following household rules.





Separation from Trusted Adults

Teachers, school counselors, and paraprofessionals often serve as important attachment figures for children in kinship care. Leaving those relationships even temporarily can activate grief and anxiety that mirrors earlier losses. A child who says “I don’t care about school” may actually be struggling deeply with the goodbye.

Your Anticipatory Anxiety About the Unknown

Children with trauma histories often struggle with transitions. The open-endedness of summer, unscheduled days, possible changes in childcare, family visits can feel unpredictable and threatening, even to children who appear outwardly fine.

Anniversaries and Seasonal Memory

Trauma is stored in the brain in ways that can be connected to seasons, smells, and time of year. For some children, late spring or early summer may unconsciously recall a previous difficult event, a removal from the home, a loss, a period of instability. You may notice a shift in mood that doesn’t seem connected to anything current.

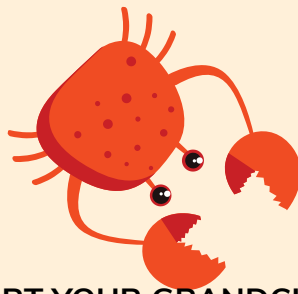
WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE AT HOME

As the school year ends, watch for these common ACE-related behavioral changes:

- Increased defiance or power struggles a child’s attempt to feel in control when things feel uncertain
- Clinginess or separation anxiety fear of being left or abandoned
- Regression returning to younger behaviors such as bedwetting, baby talk, or needing help with tasks they previously managed independently
- Emotional outbursts that seem out of proportion the nervous system responding to an internal alarm, not just the surface situation
- Withdrawal or flat affect shutting down as a protective response
- Sleep disturbances nightmares, difficulty falling asleep, or sleeping too much
- Physical complaints stomachaches, headaches, and fatigue with no clear medical cause are common somatic expressions of stress in trauma-affected children

These behaviors are communication, not manipulation. Understanding them through a trauma-informed lens is the first step toward an effective response.





STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT YOUR GRANDCHILD THIS SUMMER

1. Build a Summer Structure Early

Before the last day of school, sit down with your grandchild and co-create a loose daily schedule. Include consistent wake times, meals, and a few anchoring activities each week. Predictability is protective.

2. Name the Transition Out Loud

Don't wait for the child to bring it up. A simple conversation "School is ending soon. That can feel like a lot of change at once. How are you feeling about it?" This opens the door and signals emotional safety.

3. Honor School Relationships

If your grandchild has a trusted teacher or counselor, consider asking the school if a brief farewell visit or note exchange is possible. Honoring endings helps children process them rather than carry them forward unresolved.

4. Stay Regulated Yourself

Your nervous system is your grandchild's co-regulator. When they escalate, your calm is the most powerful intervention available. This is not easy and it requires that you tend to your own stress as well.

5. Keep Expectations Realistic

Summer does not have to be perfect. There will be hard days. That is normal. Maintaining connection and consistency through the difficult moments matters far more than keeping the peace at all costs.

6. Know When to Seek Additional Support

If behavioral changes are severe, persistent, or feel unsafe, contact your child's pediatrician, therapist, or school-based mental health provider. Early intervention prevents escalation.



A NOTE TO CAREGIVERS

You are doing one of the most demanding and most important jobs there is. Raising a child who has been through trauma takes extraordinary patience, resilience, and knowledge. The fact that you are reading this newsletter means you are actively seeking to understand and support the child in your care.

That matters more than you know.

Upcoming Trainings

-  Playing for Keeps 6/04/26
10:00 AM AM PDT
-  Safe Play Imagery 6/08/26
9:00 AM PDT
-  Progressive Muscle Relaxation
6/22/26 10:30 AM PDT
-  Stewards of Children 6/25/26
11:00 AM PDT USE Registration
Code # FFVA for free registration
-  Using Art in Therapy 6/30/26
9:00 AM PDT

[Event Details](#)

[Event Details](#)

[Event Details](#)

[Event Details](#)

[Event Details](#)

A Message from the GAP Program Director

As summer begins, many families look forward to fun, relaxation, and making memories together. At the same time, summer can bring challenges for kinship families as routines change and children have more unstructured time.

For children who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), these changes can sometimes lead to increased stress, anxiety, or challenging behaviors. During these moments, it is important to remember that your care, patience, and support are powerful tools in helping children feel safe and build resilience.

We encourage you to make time for connection and fun this summer and to take advantage of the many activities and events offered through the GAP program. These opportunities help strengthen family bonds, create positive experiences, and connect you with other kinship families.

Thank you for the dedication, love, and stability you provide every day. We are honored to support you and look forward to sharing a wonderful summer together.

