

# Grandparenting (December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006)

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Grandparents are very important people in children's lives, and they can help children be proud of their own heritage and accepting of all cultures. Children with close family ties develop a strong sense of belonging.



Some changes that are part of grand parenting today are:

- grandparents may be working
- families move more, sometimes from island to island, or even to another country..

## What grandparents can do for grandchildren

- Keep family history and culture alive. Tell stories about the history of their forefathers and family traditions.
- Spend time with grandchildren. Show them love and kindness.
- Keep in touch with other family members.
- When there are problems, grandparents can provide a secure, familiar support.
- Build self-esteem by taking a personal interest in each child.
- Respect your adult children's views on bringing up their children. Share your ideas and listen to theirs.

Grandparents may no longer be able to manage active children on a regular basis. If that is so, parents need to find services in the community such as day care centres, although grandparents may still be able to baby sit in emergencies. Looking after yourself might mean saying "no" sometimes. Some grandparents tire easily and managing more than one child for long periods may be too much.

## The new grandchild

- Support new parents in getting to know their baby. Some practical help with the housework will allow this. Your turn to cuddle the baby will come.
- Check with new parents before dropping by. New parents may want some time alone to get to know their baby.
- Let the parents know that you think they are doing a good job when you see them doing things well.
- When a new baby arrives you can offer to mind the new baby. This will give the parents time to spend with their first child who still needs to feel special.

## Safety

Your house needs to be safe when grandchildren visit. So make sure:

- breakables and the things you value are out of reach
- poisons (medicines, soap etc.) are out of reach and cupboard doors are shut. There are many items on the market to make your home child proof.
- the garden shed is locked and gates are shut, electrical outlets are covered and cords are out of reach
- saucepan handles are turned inwards on the stove, never pointed outwards
- small objects that can be pushed in ears, noses or swallowed are also out of reach



## Distance grand parenting

Many families now live a far apart. Keep the links open and support your grandchildren wherever they live.

- Invite grandchildren to visit on holiday - together or one at a time.
- Visit them.
- Keep regular telephone contact.
- Write letters, send photographs, e-mails, audio and/or visual recordings with family stories in them.

## **Grandparenting ideas**

- Have a box of special play-things for visits. Add something new occasionally.
- Wash toys in hot, soapy water after use, ready for the next time.
- Tell stories about things that happened when you and your children were growing up. Children love stories and looking at family photos. Borrow books and tapes from friends or your library.
- As they grow older keep an interest in what they are doing. Go along to their school sports days, concerts etc.
- Remember that hairstyles, clothes and language are different with every generation.
- Be a good listener. Grandparents often have time to give children a real opportunity to talk about their interests and feelings.

## **Separation and step-grandparenting**

- Your grandchildren will need your support at these times.
- Try not to discuss adult problems with children, and listen to their feelings.
- If your son or daughter is distressed you may need to explain to the grandchildren what is happening. This needs tact and sensitivity. Both partners are your grandchildren's parents and it is normal for them to love and want to be with both of them. They may need reassurance that both parents still love them and that the break-up is not their fault.
- Try to keep positive relationships with both your grandchildren's parents so that they will want you to go on playing a part in the grandchildren's lives. Talk this over with the children's parents and together decide how best you can help.
- If your son or daughter remarries, it is important to support the new relationship whatever you may think.
- If step-grandchildren arrive you will need to think about sharing your time between the grandchildren. Every situation is different and it is important to consider everyone's feelings.

## **Grandparenting when the parents are teenagers**

Talk with other grandparents who are supporting young parents. You can share your hopes and fears. Your teenager will need support at this time, especially in accepting responsibility for the very grown-up task they are taking on. They need you to help but not to take over!

## **Reminders for grandparents**

Notice what parents do well and tell them. The best thing that you can do for your grandchildren is support their parents.

## **Reminders for parents**

Talk with grandparents about how best they can support you as a parent. When grandparents give advice remember, they have a lot of experience. Think it over and then decide what you will do.

Children can adapt if your house rules differ from the grandparent. If you think the rules at grandparents' house are too strict, or they are not safe, talk to the grandparents about your concerns and offer some suggestions.

Finally, parents RELAX! A bit of spoiling by grandparents won't hurt your children or damage their relationship with you.