

What’s So “Grand” About Grandparenting?

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Grandparenting is an opportunity to play, to ‘fall in love’ again, and to appreciate the magic of a developing mind. Grandparents can share the things they are passionate about with family members; see the world in a new way through younger eyes; and experience music, nature, reading, gardening, theater, or other interests in conjunction with a curious mind.

Approximately 72 percent of Americans over the age of 50 or roughly 78 million Baby Boomers have grandchildren. The average age of first-time grandparents is between 49 and 53 years. However, because of the increased teen pregnancy rate, more parents are becoming grandparents in their late twenties or early thirties.

Being a grandparent isn’t the same as being a parent. In most cases, grandparents aren’t the primary caregivers and they aren’t required to lay down as many rules to discipline their grandchildren. Grandparents have the benefit of interacting on a level once removed from the day-to-day responsibilities, which makes it easier to develop a close bond. Grandparenting can provide continuity in a child’s life.

What is the Role of a Grandparent in a Child’s Life?

Establishing some ground rules with sons or daughters is a good first step to a long and successful relationship with your grandchild. Dr. Lillian Carson, a psychotherapist and author of “The Essential Grandparent,” suggests grandparents “encourage, support, and bite their tongue.” New parents want to raise their children in ways that are different from the way they were raised. They have their own values and ideas. Societal rules have changed and some grandparenting ideas are just “old fashioned .” If grandparents see a threat to the grandchild’s safety, they must speak up. Otherwise it is important to remember to be respectful of the younger parent’s rules, be helpful with caring for the children when possible, and enjoy being with the children.

Grandparents are Role Models

As part of the older generation, grandparents are the role models. They are the bearers of family history and values that can be shared with younger generations. They can lighten the load of daily life by offering loving and supportive parenting to their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

Grandparents must keep the lines of communication open in order to have a close relationship where there is mutual love and respect. Grandparents who listen to what grandchildren have to say gain another experience for living and widen the dimension of their interests.

Tips for grandparents to talk with/or to grandchildren:

- Get to the point. Don’t ramble or repeat.
- Be prepared to talk about lively and interesting subjects.
- Grandparents should avoid constant complaints.
- Stay away from subjects such as health and minor everyday gripes.
- Avoid concentrating on I or me. Avoid monopolizing the conversation.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Listen to what is being said, be enthusiastic and excited about the topic.

Activities to Do with Grandchildren

Take time to have fun. Create a wonderful loving relationship by sharing the things you love with them and be available to hear about the ideas and activities that excite them.

Take it easy together. Make an effort to enjoy time together. Grandparents interact with grandchildren without dealing with the same daily pressures as a parent. Slow down and become absorbed in the activity.

One child at a time. Spend time with each individual grandchild. This gives grandparents and grandchildren an opportunity to bond without competition.

Go outside. Children love the outdoors. They enjoy parks, playgrounds, and walks by the lake. Throwing stones into the water or playing in the sand can be especially rewarding times. Start these activities when the grandchildren are toddlers and expand the games as they get older. Always remember safety first.

See the sights. Concerts, plays, museums, and parks provide opportunities to be together and exchange ideas and opinions.

Play games. Bring out the board and card games but also take time to learn about the grandchildren's computer games and other toys. This will give grandparents an opportunity to teach about good sportsmanship and playing fairly. Listen to what the grandchildren are saying.

Share your interests. Engage in hobbies and activities the grandparent and the grandchild loves. These activities may turn out to be an important point of connection. For example, a grandchild may find an interest in a flower gardening and the grandparent may be delighted to learn about the Harry Potter book series.

Communicate family. Tell stories about games or trips shared when the grandchild's parents were young. This is a great way to weave a 'tapestry' of shared experiences for the entire family.

Grandparents are often in a great position to lavish love and attention on grandchildren without the total duties of parenthood. Just like parents, grandparents worry about their grandchildren and are concerned about their well-being. They often are exhausted when caring for grandchildren. However,

the majority of grandparents can be caring companions who are thrilled and honored to spend time with grandchildren. Grandparents are important links in tightening family bonds by sharing the joy taken in raising grandchildren.

Acknowledgment

This revision is based on the original NebGuide, "Being A 'Grand' Parent" by Herbert G. Lindgren, extension family life specialist.

Resources

"A Grandparent's Role in the Family," http://www.aarp.org/families/grandparents/family_relationships/a2004-01-16-grandparentsrole.html

"Grandparenting," University of Maine Cooperative Extension Bulletin #4185, <http://www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/htmlpubs/4185.htm>

"Benefits of Grandparenting," Ohio State University Extension Factsheet, http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/pdf/Benefits_Grandparenting.pdf

UNL Extension publications are available online at <http://extension.unl.edu/publications>.

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