

Grandparenting

Grandparents are very special in children's lives. They can give children lots of love and security, have fun times and share the family history. Children are lucky when they are close to their grandparents as well as their parents.

Grandparents don't have set roles as parents do. Talk with your adult children about what each of you expects. Some grandparents are closely involved in children's lives while others are grandparenting from a distance if their children live far away. Others may be grandparenting through sensitive family situations such as separation, divorce, or in a step-family.

Whatever kind of grandparent you are it's important to support your family, to be open to new ideas and willing to talk things over. Seek help and support for yourself if you need to.

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Grandparenting today

Some things may have changed since you were raising your own children:

- Children's behaviour, their knowledge and language, and the technology they use may take time to get used to.
- Ideas about parenting may be different. It's important to be open to new ideas and update your knowledge and understanding. Listen carefully to your children's views and support them if you possibly can. If you think differently, bring up your ideas and listen to theirs. They may not do things the way you would, and you may have to accept this in the end.

- Grandparents may be busy working and or doing other things and not have much time to help their children. Talk about how often you will visit them or they will visit you, how often you will phone or have contact in other ways. Talk about what babysitting you'll do — remember what you do for the first grandchild may be expected for others.



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What grandparents can do

You can enrich your grandchildren's lives by giving them love and supporting their parents. Some things you can do:

- encourage your son's or daughter's parenting and be a good example — try not to criticise and only give advice if asked
- spend time with your grandchildren, have fun, explore the world and just be together. Your personal interest in them will build their self-esteem. Grandfathers in particular may have time to spend with their grandchildren they might not have had with their own children
- keep up family networks and stay in touch with family members
- talk about the family history — your own and other ancestors. This gives children a sense of belonging and helps them know where they fit in the world. Tell them stories about their parents when they were young
- talk about old family traditions as the family grows and changes and new traditions are built — you can help keep the best of the old, as you and your family work out new ways to manage celebrations, holidays and birthdays
- give security and protection — especially at times when there are family problems. Grandparents can be there to support and protect grandchildren as a 'safe haven'
- be your grandchildren's friend and confidante
- be a role model — show your grandchildren they too can survive life's challenges
- teach skills you have that they may not learn elsewhere
- let them teach you new skills
- inspire — show your belief and wonderment as they tackle new things.



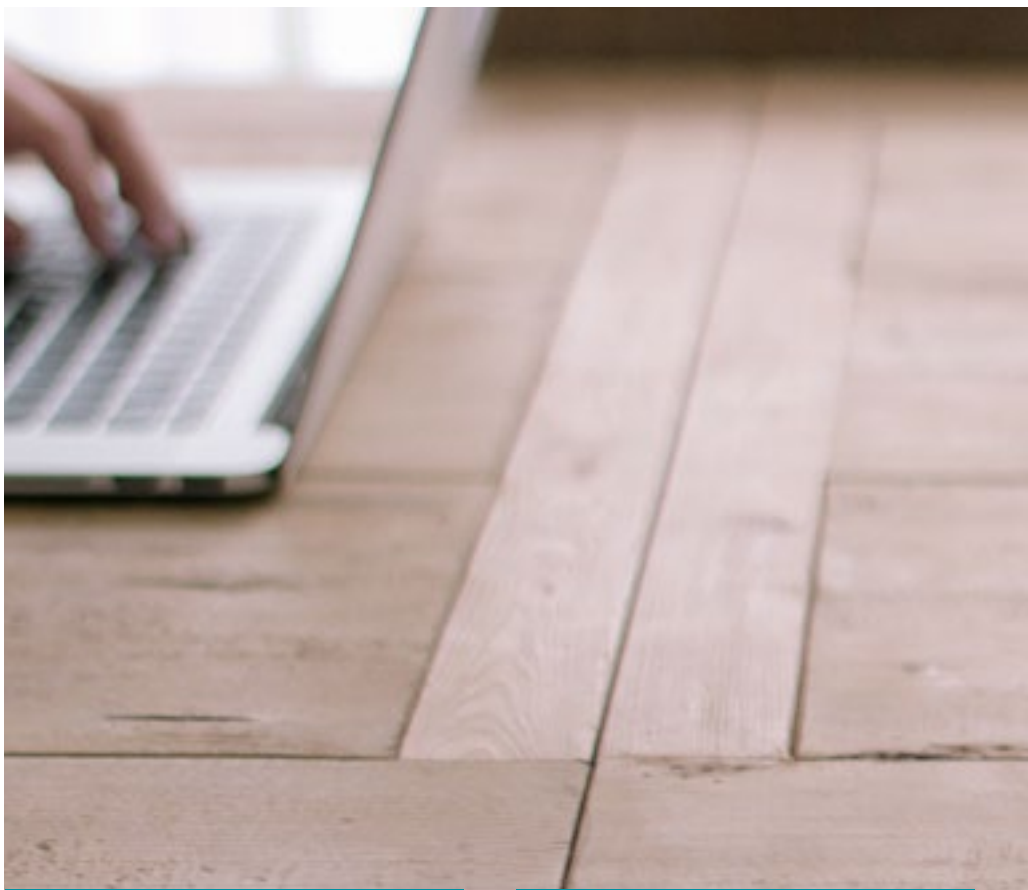
Grandparenting ideas

- Your home may not be child-proof. When your grandchildren are young:
 - check that your good things (china and pot plants) and your poisons (medicines, cleaning and garden products) are out of reach
 - make sure any swimming pool is properly fenced and young children can't fall or climb into other water features such as ponds, troughs or tanks.
 - make sure you have correct child restraints in your car, and a safe cot for babies.
- Have a box of toys, games and books that are special for visits. Add something new sometimes.
- Children love stories. Keep a supply of books to read to them. Tell stories about the family history.
- Read a few current books on parenting so you are up to date with modern ideas.
- Keep up with your grandchildren's interests. As they grow older take an interest in what they are doing. Listen to some modern music so you can talk or ask questions about it.
- Have your own 'house rules' about the amount and type of television and movie watching in your home.
- Be a good listener. Grandparents often have time to give children a real chance to talk about their interests and feelings.
- Let them know when you are interested in going to their activities, such as school, sports and concerts.
- Teenagers in particular, often value support from their grandparents. Remember that hairstyles, activities and language are different from when you were a parent and criticism may spoil your relationship.
- Children love to cook and often with parents being so busy, it can be a special thing you do together.

The new grandchild

The arrival of a new grandchild is a very important time for your adult children and for you.

- Their partner may want some time to get to know their new baby before they involve other people.
- One of the best things you can do is help the new parents get to know their baby. Your help with the dishes and washing/ironing might be more needed than for you to cuddle the baby. Your turn to do the cuddling will come.
- Let young parents know you think they are doing a good job when you see them doing things well. Having a baby is a vulnerable time and support and praise really helps parents, for example, 'You're such a lovely mother', 'How lucky he is to have you as his dad'.
- When a second baby arrives, offer to mind the new baby. This will give parents time to spend with their first child who may feel left out and need to feel special and loved.



Distance grandparenting

Many families live a long way apart in different states and countries. You can still have a loving relationship with, and support your grandchildren.

- Offer to have your grandchildren visit you on holiday — together or one at a time. Children benefit from individual relationships with grandparents, not always in a group.
- Visit them when you can.
- Keep regular telephone contact.
- Write letters, send photos, tapes or videos and include family stories in them. Learn to use email, facebook or other social networking technologies so you can ‘talk’ with them online. Be sure you use this safely.
- Develop some new family traditions for managing birthdays or other occasions.

Separation and stepgrandparenting

If your son or daughter’s relationship ends it can bring some problems for grandparents.

- You may feel let down or disappointed, sad or angry. Talk it over with someone, a counsellor if necessary. Your grandchildren are going to need your support at this time.
- Don’t talk to your grandchildren about your disappointment with their parent(s), but listen to their feelings.
- If your son or daughter is very upset you may need to explain to your grandchildren what is happening, and help them talk about their feelings. This needs a great deal of tact and sensitivity as both of the couple are your grandchildren’s parents. Children usually love and want to be with both parents.
- Try to keep positive relationships with both parents, so that they will still want you to play a part in their children’s lives.



Grandparents raising grandchildren

- If your son or daughter remarries or enters another relationship there will be other issues to think about. It's important to support the new relationship in front of the children, whatever you think about it.
- If step-grandchildren arrive you will need to think and maybe talk about other things such as:
 - presents each of the children will receive for birthdays
 - what you will do about your will and family inheritance
 - how you will share your time between your grandchildren.

These are individual questions that need to be worked out for your own situation — it's important that everyone's feelings are considered.

Sometimes grandparents are called on to do the parenting while a son or daughter goes back to work after a separation. If this happens, be sure that

you are willing to do it. It will probably be of great value to your grandchildren as long as it's not a burden to you.

Some grandparents in this situation resent the fact that it is hard, physical work or they haven't time to do things with their own friends. They worry about what will happen to their grandchildren if they lose their health and cannot continue the childcare.

Talk these things over with your son or daughter or a supportive person. It is important to take care of yourself in order to care for your grandchildren.

Your grandchildren may struggle with their own feelings about the changes. This could show up in their behaviour.

Behaviour problems can come from unhappiness. It is important to talk this over with your grandchildren's parents, so you can get help with managing the children.

There are now many grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

You may take on this role suddenly and unexpectedly. It may follow family break-up, or when there are serious problems such as physical or mental illness, substance abuse or neglect.

You may want your grandchildren to remain within the family after a parent's death, imprisonment or family break-up. It can mean letting go of plans and dreams, friends and activities, and taking on tasks that are not the same as other people your own age. This can affect your health, finances and lifestyle.

If you are in this situation it's important to seek help and support.

Grandparenting when the parents are teenagers

Becoming a grandparent when your teenage child becomes a parent can come as a shock and you may need time to get used to the idea. If you have mixed feelings, it might help to talk with someone who understands.

- Grandparents-to-be worry about their young people and how they will cope. You might also worry about what your friends might think. This is normal.
- Your teenager will need your support, but will also need to take responsibility for the very grown-up task of parenting. They need you to help but not take over!
- It helps to talk with other grandparents who are supporting young parents. You can share your fears and hopes and get ideas.
- It's important to consider how much help you want to give. There may be extra pressure on you to offer childcare. This is your decision. Childcare given with resentment is not usually in anybody's interests.
- The young parent(s)-to-be may be happy for you to be there for the birth.
- One of the best things you can do for young parents is to notice what they do well and tell them.

Reminders for parents

- Ask your parents (the grandparents) how they would like to be involved in your children's lives.
- Be willing to talk things over.
- Be open to receiving advice and suggestions from others. Think it over and then decide what you will do. If you decide not to take their advice, explain why.
- Remember that children can adjust to different ways of doing things, at your house and the grandparents' house. It's one of the ways they learn about the world.
- If you think the rules at the grandparents' house are too strict and are making your children unhappy, or they are not safe, you will need to explain to the grandparents why you feel that way.
- Remember that a bit of spoiling by grandparents won't hurt your children or damage their relationship with you.
- Some grandparents tire easily and managing more than one preschool child for more than a short time may be too much. Be sensitive to this.
- Remember that grandparents have their own lives as well. Respect their decision about what they can and are willing to do for you.

Reminders for grandparents

- Grandparenting is a very special relationship. It's a chance to do for your grandchildren what you may not have done for your own children.
- One of the best things you can do for your grandchildren is to support their parents.
- Be willing to talk things over and ask your adult children what kind of help they need most.
- Support your adult children in their parenting.
- Notice what they do well and tell them.
- Ask their advice. Don't expect them to take your advice but be willing to share ideas.
- If you are a grandparent raising your grandchild you have new responsibilities and lifestyle changes — get support from others who understand.



Grandparenting

This guide's content was produced by Parenting SA, Women's and Children's Health Network.

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