

Welcome to Grandparenting

Grandparents are more than just fun and games: your importance can't be overstated. However, with the downfall of the extended family, surrogates have taken over many traditional grandparenting activities. For example: fast-food often replaces home cooking; family therapists help with family problems; and celebrities are heroes. Unfortunately, these surrogates do not love your grandchildren as you do. Caring and active grandparents can do all of the above – and do them much better.



Typically, parents are the most powerful people in a child's universe. One parent typically means playtime; the other parent means business. However, grandparents typically are seen by children as being superior: a parent's parent. It creates a sense of respect. But respect works both ways: don't forget to treat the children with respect. Remember, a grandparent's influence is overwhelming.

Grandparents play **many vital roles** in the lives of their grandchildren. For example:

Protector

- Who can protect those precious children from the cold, cruel world? Grandparents. Kids know they can count on Grandma or Grandpa. Protection can be as simple as insisting on a nap – you are actually protecting them from fatigue. Making your children feel safe can also be complicated, as when World War III erupts in their own home. Then, you can comfort them over the telephone, remove them temporarily from the situation, and give them emotional support.
- When you are with your grandchildren, you protect them from strangers as well as hurt feelings. If they're embarrassed to tell Daddy about the school-yard bully, you can take the matter into your own capable hands by talking it through with the child and discussing the situation with Daddy yourself.

Role model

- To a granddaughter, her grandmother is the prime example of what a mature woman should be. Although she gets the basics from her mother, that relationship is fraught with other concerns. At times she will be prone to rebel from being cast in her mother's shadow. You are the archetype. Help her standards be high.
- Have you ever heard the claim that the way a man treats his mother is a precursor of the way he'll treat his wife? Let's take this theory a little farther: if your grandson respects and values his grandmother, he is likely to do the same with other mature women. Your part is simply to be a good role model, so give him an example as reference.

Teacher

- You don't need a degree in early childhood education to be a great teacher to your grandchild. Everything you do serves as an example of good conduct, starting with the basics. As a baby, your grandchild will copy the sound you make when you click your tongue. She'll blow kisses after seeing you blow them to her. He'll learn to talk by repeating your words.
- Later on, things get a little more complicated. She will continue to learn by mimicking behavior – not just her parents' actions, but yours as well. He will unconsciously begin to think along the same lines. Ethics and values, the most vital elements of a person's behavior throughout his or her life, are learned early, and you are an excellent source for them.
- You are also the best history teacher they'll ever have. Children love stories. Tales of your experience in the real world teach them about that world in a direct, non-threatening manner. Your life is more glamorous than you might think, so describe it in terms of the big picture, adding details to make it personal and make history come alive for your grandchildren.

Caregiver

- An individual, such as a parent, foster parent, grandparent, or head of household, who attends to the needs of a child or dependent adult.
- Grandparents are caregivers, but the extent to which grandparents are responsible for caregiving varies.

Three Types of Grandparent Caregivers

The “day care” grandparents. Focus on helping the child's parent and on fulfilling their own needs. These grandparents tend to be least affected by their caretaking role because the children return home at the end of the day.

The “living with” grandparent. These grandparents provide daily care for their grandchildren, but do not have legal custody.

The “custodial” grandparent. They provide daily care and make the decisions.

No matter what type of grandparent you are, there is benefit in learning how to be an effective grandparent. Acknowledging that as a grandparent you have raised a child or children before, you have many experiences that are priceless. However, research has shown that methods we once were taught have now become outdated. For example, babies are now put on their backs to sleep instead of their stomachs – this reduces the risk of SIDS.

No matter what type of grandparent you are, welcome to your new **Adventures in Grandparenting!**

References

Prepared by Dr. LaVona Traywick, Assistant Professor – Gerontology, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service.

University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating

The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital or veteran status, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.