

Grandparenting

Grandparents are a really important part of children's lives. But grandparenting today is very different to how it was 50 years ago.

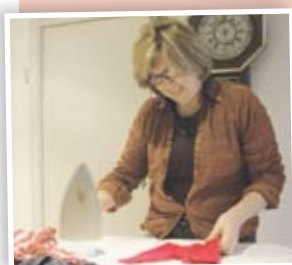
Grandparents today can be in their forties or younger, and live an active life for many years. As people live longer, grandparenting can last as many as 30 years or more.

Being a grandparent is a very special role. It often brings an opportunity to do for your grandchildren what you may not have been able to do for your own children.

What grandparents can do:

- be your grandchild's friend
- be a role model so they too can survive life's challenges
- provide a safety net if relationships with parents are strained
- have fun, explore the world and just be together with your grandchild
- give your grandchild love
- let the family know about old family traditions
- if you live far away keep in touch through phone calls and cards and make visits special
- give security and protection, especially when there are family problems. Grandparents can support and protect grandchildren and provide a 'safe haven'.





Expectations of grandparents

Grandparents don't have a set role, like parents do. Talk to your adult child about what you would like to do as a grandparent.

Talk about:

- how often you will visit each other
- how often you will ring and when not to ring
- what babysitting you will do. Say if it is too much for you, or you need time to yourself. Looking after yourself might mean saying "No" sometimes
- what you can afford to do and what to do about presents as the family grows bigger.

Listen carefully to your adult child's views on bringing up children and support them if you can. Talk through any problems with them. They may not do things the way you would, and you may have to accept this.

The new grandchild

This is a very important time in the life of your adult child and your own life.

Remember:

- take your cues from them
- your child and their partner may want some time alone to get to know their new baby
- support the new parents in getting to know their baby. Help with the dishes and washing/ironing might be more needed than you cuddling the baby. Your turn to do the cuddling will come
- having a baby is a vulnerable time, support and praise really helps parents, e.g. "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 gives parents time to spend with their first child who might feel left out and needs to feel special again.

Grandparenting ideas

- When your grandchild is young, check that your good things (china and pot plants) and poisons (from medicines to dishwashing powder) are safely out of reach.

- Have a box of toys, games and books ready for visits.
- Keep a supply of books to read to them. Tell stories about the family history.
- Read a few recent books on child-rearing so you are up to date with new information / advice about safety, health and care.
- Be a good listener. Grandparents often have time to give children a real opportunity to talk about their interests and feelings.
- Let them know you are interested in going to their activities, like school sports and concerts.
- Teenagers in particular value the support of their grandparents.
- Many children love to cook and often parents are too busy for this to happen together, so make it a special treat when they visit.

Separation and stepgrandparenting

If your son or daughter's relationship breaks up it can make grandparenting tricky:

- you may feel let down, disappointed, sad or angry
- talk to a counsellor if necessary. Your grandchild will need your support at this time
- don't talk to your grandchild about your disappointment with their parent(s)
- if your son or daughter is very upset you may need to explain what is happening to your grandchild, and listen to their feelings
- try to keep positive relationships with both parents, so they want you to go on playing a part in their child's lives
- if your son or daughter remarries or enters another relationship there will be other issues to think about. It is important to support the new relationship in front of your grandchild, whatever you think.

If you are called on to do the parenting while a son or daughter goes back to work make sure you want to do it. It will be of great help to your grandchild if it's not a burden to you.