

# Grandparenting



**Grandparents can be very special in children's lives. They can bring lots of love, security, care and fun, as well as connection to family history and culture.**

**There are many ways to be a grandparent. You may be closely connected with your grandchildren's lives or have less involvement. It can help to talk with your adult children about what each of you expects and what will work for everyone. The needs of families and grandparents change over time so it helps to be flexible and willing to talk things over.**

## Being a grandparent

Being a grandparent can bring you much joy as grandchildren arrive and you see your grown-up son or daughter becoming a parent themselves. Your love can enrich grandchildren's lives and you can be an important support for the whole family.

Many grandparents have busy lives. You may be working, volunteering, have hobbies, interests and friends, as well as being part of your grandchildren's lives. Grandchildren and parents can be busy too and their family life can be hectic. You might agree on regular times to catch up with grandchildren or have contact as needed. The arrangements you make can change as your grandchildren grow up, as more come along, or things change for you and your family.

Some things that can impact your involvement are:

- how close you live to your grandchildren
- whether you drive or have other transport
- any health concerns that affect what you are able to do
- any problems in relationships with your adult children, their partners or ex-partners.

## Parenting ideas

Ideas about parenting change over time and may be different to when you were raising your own children.

It can help to:

- be open to new ideas and ways of doing things
- listen to your adult children's views and be tactful and respectful
- try not to criticise and resist the temptation to offer advice, unless asked.

If parents don't do things the way you would, you may have to accept this. The most important thing is that children are safe and cared for. Some sources of parenting information are listed at the end of this Guide.

**Being a grandparent is a special role in life that can bring you great delight and provide many benefits for grandchildren and their parents.**

## What grandparents can bring to grandchildren's lives

Grandparents can enrich their grandchildren's lives by giving them love, time and attention.

Some ways to do this are to:

- spend time with grandchildren having fun, exploring the world and just being together. Some grandparents have time to spend with grandchildren that they didn't with their own children. Your interest in your grandchildren will build their self-esteem
- be a good listener. Grandparents can often give children a real chance to talk about their interests and feelings
- give security and protection. Grandparents can be a 'safe haven', especially in difficult times
- let them know you are interested in going to their activities, eg school, sports and concerts
- keep up family networks and stay in touch with family members
- talk about 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 stories about their parents when they were young
- talk about family traditions. You can help keep the best of the old as the family grows and new traditions are developed, eg how you manage holidays, birthdays or other celebrations
- be a role model. Show your grandchildren they too can survive life's challenges
- inspire your grandchildren. Show your belief in them and wonderment as they tackle new things
- stay connected with grandchildren as they grow up. Teenagers in particular, often value support from their grandparents.

**Grandparents can bring wisdom, love and fun as well as help and support at difficult times.**



## Tips for grandparents

If your grandchildren are very young and visiting your home, you may need to make some changes to help keep them safe.

- Put poisons such as medicines, cigarettes, cleaning and garden products, button batteries and dishwasher tablets out of reach. You could put 'child-proof' locks on cupboard doors and make sure your 'good things' that may break are away too, eg china, pot plants.
- Put up barriers to keep young children away from water, eg ponds, troughs, tanks. Ensure any swimming pool is properly fenced. Always supervise young children in the bath.
- Sleep babies on their back, in a safe cot and don't put soft things such as doonas, pillows or soft toys in the cot.
- The law says that children must have the right safety seat or seat belt for their age and size. You may need to have these installed in your car.

Kidsafe SA has great information about safety for children. See the end of this Guide for contact details.

Some ideas for when children visit are to:

- have a box of toys and games children can play with. Add new things to do together as they grow and develop
- keep a supply of books children can read or you can read together. Children love stories. Tell them stories from your life or about the family history
- cook with children. It can be a special thing you do together
- get them involved in other activities or interests you have, eg gardening, carpentry, art, music. Teach them skills they may not learn elsewhere
- let them teach you new skills
- keep up with their interests as they get older. Listen to some of their music or use new technologies so you can talk or ask questions about them.

**It's OK to have your own 'house rules' about how technology is used in your home, eg phones, tablets, computers, TV. Support any rules that parents have agreed on.**

## What about babysitting?

Grandparents may be delighted to babysit, or have some concerns.

Babysitting can:

- be of great value to your grandchildren and their parents as long as it's not a burden to you
- be enjoyable time spent with grandchildren building your relationship
- be tiring, especially if there are preschoolers or you have health concerns. It can be hard, physical work
- cause resentment if you feel you are being taken advantage of, or it impacts your other commitments.

You might worry about becoming unwell and not being able to continue the care. It can help to talk things over with the parents. They may be able to investigate other suitable care options.

## When a grandchild arrives

The arrival of a baby is a very important time for your adult children and you. Parents may want some time to get to know their baby before they involve other people.

You could:

- ask parents what kind of help they need. Things like housework, doing the dishes, shopping or looking after older brothers or sisters might be more useful than for you to cuddle the baby. Your turn for cuddling will come
- let the parents know you think they are doing a good job when you see them doing things well, eg 'You're such a lovely mother', 'How lucky he is to have you as his Dad'
- make sure your vaccinations are up to date, eg for whooping cough. Infections can be passed on to young babies who are very vulnerable, especially in the first 6 months. If you are unwell, stay away or seek medical advice.

## Grandparenting from a distance

If you and your grandchildren live far apart, you can still have a loving relationship and be part of their lives.

Some ways to do this are to:

- offer to have 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 in regular contact. Send cards, letters, photos, talk on the phone or use online technology, eg email, Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp or other social networking sites. Be sure you use these safely
- develop new family traditions for being part of birthdays or other occasions from a distance.

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**You can still be involved in your grandchildren's lives from a distance. Your love and support is important to them.**  
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## Grandparenting through family break-up

If your son or daughter's relationship with their partner ends, it can affect your grandparenting.

- You may feel disappointed, sad or angry. There may be relief if there was an unhappy or violent relationship. Talk with a counsellor if you need to. Your grandchildren and their parents may need your support at this time.
- You may need to explain to grandchildren what is happening, especially if your son or daughter is very upset. This needs a great deal of tact and sensitivity.
- Don't say negative things about their parents in front of your grandchildren. Children usually love and are loyal to both parents.
- Listen to children and help them talk about their feelings.





- Try to keep positive relationships with both parents. This works better for your grandchildren and will make it easier to stay part of their lives.
- If your son or daughter remarries or enters another relationship there will be other issues to consider. It's important to support the new relationship in front of children, whatever you think about it.
- If step-grandchildren arrive, some things to consider are:
  - how you will share your time between grandchildren
  - what you will do about your Will and family inheritance
  - what will happen for special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas or holidays.

Each family situation is different. It's important that everyone's feelings are considered.

Your grandchildren may struggle with their feelings about the changes. This could show as behaviour problems coming from their unhappiness. Talk with their parents about how to manage and support your grandchildren. They may need professional help to deal with their feelings and you may need extra help to care for them.

**Sometimes family problems make grandparenting difficult, and you may find relationships demanding. Keeping communication open and respectful benefits everyone.**

## If your teenager becomes a parent

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 can help to talk with other grandparents who are supporting young parents. You can share your fears, hopes and ideas.

- Grandparents-to-be can worry about their teenager, how they will cope as a parent, and what their future will be. You might also worry what your friends will think.
- 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's important to consider how much help you want to give. There may be extra pressure on you to babysit.
- 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.**

## Grandparents raising grandchildren

More grandparents today are raising their grandchildren themselves. Many are single grandparents. You may take this on suddenly and unexpectedly due to serious problems such as family break-up, physical or mental illness, substance abuse, neglect, or a parent's death or imprisonment. You may want your grandchildren to remain within the family.

This can mean letting go of your plans and dreams and taking on tasks that are not the same as others your age. Your health, finances and lifestyle can be affected.





Some grandparents feel grief, loss and worry over the situation. You may also feel grateful for the many rewards that come from raising your child's children, and maintaining family connections and culture.

If you are in this situation it's important to look after your own health and wellbeing. It can help to spend time with supportive friends, do activities you enjoy and seek any support you need.

**Grandparents raising grandchildren have new responsibilities and lifestyle changes. It can help to talk with others who understand.**

## If you are the parent

If you are the grandchildren's parent, you have the chance to see your own parents (the grandparents) in a new light as they take on their grandparenting role.

It can help to:

- talk with your parents about their involvement in your children's lives. Share ideas and what each of you expects
- be sensitive to their needs and flexible as things change for them. Some grandparents tire easily. Managing preschool children, even for a short time may be too much
- be open to advice and suggestions from grandparents and others. Consider their ideas even if you don't agree. If you decide to take a particular action, explain why
- remember children can adjust to different ways of doing things at your house and their grandparents' house. It's one of the ways they learn about the world. If you think grandparents' rules are too strict, or things are happening to make children unhappy or unsafe, explain why you feel that way
- accept that a bit of 'spoiling' by grandparents benefits children as they feel loved and special. It won't harm them or damage their relationship with you.

**If you are the parent, it is important to respect grandparents' decisions about what they are willing to do for you.**

## Getting help

Grandparents often need help and support too. Sometimes just talking with others who understand and sharing ideas can help. If there is conflict with adult children, partners, ex-partners or others there are services that can help with family relationships or the legal rights of grandparents.

### Want more information?

#### Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100  
For advice on child health and parenting

#### Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Phone 1300 733 606 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment.  
See [www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com) for child health and parenting information

#### Grandparents for Grandchildren SA Inc

Level 2, 345 King William Street, Adelaide  
Phone (08) 8212 1937  
A not-for-profit organisation providing support and advocacy for grandparents and kinship carers dealing with emotional, financial and legal complexities of caring for grandchildren [www.gfgsa.com.au](http://www.gfgsa.com.au)

#### Department of Social Services

Australian government department with information about issues grandparents may face when raising grandchildren, contacts for support and booklet 'Grandparents Raising Grandchildren' [www.dss.gov.au](http://www.dss.gov.au)

#### Raising Children Network

For information on the benefits and challenges of grandparenting [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

#### Parenting SA

For other Parent Easy Guides including 'Safety for children 0-4 years', 'Television', 'Safe technology use', 'Cyber safety', 'Why stories are important', 'Growing and learning in the family', 'Families that work well', 'Family break-up', 'About babies', 'Living with toddlers' and 'Living with young people' [www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)





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of South Australia**

**Parenting SA**

A partnership between the Department for Education  
and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

**Ph: 08 8303 1660**  
**[www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)**

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

**Important:** This information is not intended  
to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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