



# Benefits of Grandparenting

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The 2000 U.S. Census indicated about 56 million Americans are grandparents. Most grandparents begin this role during their middle age. Due to the increased teen pregnancy rate, many parents may have become grandparents at a much younger age. Today's grandparent role and image is changing and may include dealing with blended and nontraditional households.

Many grandparents are very busy, active people. Many are employed and often at the peak of their careers. These grandparents are often healthier, wealthier, and better educated than their grandparents were. They may also be involved with the care of their parents as well as their own grandchildren. Some may be going through many changes, including midlife stresses such as a career change, divorce, widowhood, remarriage, health problems, and/or depression.

Grandparents who live near their grandchildren often contribute and help in the care of their grandchildren. Many enjoy spending time with their children and grandchildren often in a much higher technological way and some take vacations together. How well the parent and grandparent interact has a great influence on whether the relationship with the grandchildren is close or distant.

## Benefits of Grandparenting

The benefits of being a grandparent include:

- Being involved in your children's and grandchildren's lives and their many achievements.
- Providing extended family support, encouragement, and/or companionship.
- Being a better grandparent than perhaps you were a parent, due to years of experience.
- Continuing the family line.

## Benefits to Grandchildren

Grandchildren also receive important benefits from grandparents, which may include:

- Developing positive attitudes toward aging.
- Learning about their families' origins, culture, and customs or traditions.
- Developing life skills and leisure-time activities.

## Being a "Good" Grandparent

Grandparents generally want to develop a "good" relationship with their grandchildren. Grandparents need to remember they should respect the parent's way of doing things. Consider these suggestions in developing your style of grandparenting:

- Listen to your grandchildren. By tuning in to them, you may be able to tune out some of your problems.
- Talk with your grandchildren. Keep these tips in mind:
  - Get to the point and stick to it without rambling or repeating.
  - Be prepared to talk about lively and interesting subjects.
  - Avoid complaints. Stay away from such subjects as health or minor everyday problems/concerns.
  - Avoid concentrating on I, I, I, or me, me, me. Do NOT monopolize the conversation.
  - Maintain eye contact to determine if the listener is really hearing what is said or is bored.
  - Be enthusiastic and excited about what is being said.
- Remember you are the GRAND-parent. You do NOT have the right to take away a mother's or a father's right to do their own parenting.

- Discuss discipline with parents and discipline only when you are in charge. Strive for consistency between what is permitted by parents and grandparents.
- Express your feelings by laughing when you are happy and crying when you are sad.
- Babysit only when you want to, feel up to it, and are not being inconvenienced.
- Be aware of the example you are setting, because the grandchildren and your children will learn much about love from seeing and feeling it.
- Love your grandchildren for what they are, not for what you think they should be.

### Have Fun with Your Grandchildren

Most grandparents pursue their roles out of a strong desire to have fun. Take the time to be with your grandchildren and build a lasting wonderful relationship by spending time with them on holidays, developing hobbies, going on outings/vacations together, giving gifts, writing letters, and sending e-mails and instant text messages.

### Long Distance Grandparenting

Many grandparents do not live geographically close to their grandchildren. To develop a special close relationship when you are miles apart, try some of these ideas:

- Exchanging books, movies/DVDs and music cassette tapes/compact disks.
- Mailing newspaper clippings, pictures, school newspapers, and artwork.
- Recording special events at school, church, or extracurricular activities.
- Sending pictures through the mail or digital pictures via the Internet.

Whether your contribution is large or small to your grandchildren, what you do is important. When a close relationship is formed, this attachment is often developed for life. This attachment comes with the experience of being loved and accepted, a sense of security and warmth, and the gift of a role model grandparent.

The benefits of being a grandparent are very similar to the following famous quote by Helen Keller:

*“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen, or even touched; they must be felt with the heart.”*

### Adapted from:

Lingren, H. G. (1986). Being A GRAND' Parent, HEG 86-210, NebGuide, Cooperative Extension, University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

U.S. Census Facts for Features Grandparents Grandparents Day 2006, CB06-FF.13 (Unpublished data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation)

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