



# Strengthening Grandparent/Grandchild Ties

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## Grandfamily Connections

- **Our ability to interact with and connect to family members is integral, especially for those individuals in the second half of life.**
- **Grandparent/ grandchild relationships are central to the lives of people as they age and play a unique role in promoting their well-being.**
- **Not only do grandparents benefit from playing an active role in their grandchildren's lives, but the entire family, including all generations, can be positively impacted in numerous ways.**

The role of grandparents is very meaningful in later life. Roughly 70 million Americans are grandparents and they may have this long-term role for half of their lives. Grandparenthood often is thought to be one of the most rewarding family roles. Grandparents can play a part in guiding and helping their grandchildren grow and develop while typically having less responsibility and stress than the parent. Grandparents take great joy in watching a young child grow into adulthood and taking part in their various life accomplishments. Grandparenting has been shown to have health benefits; for instance, in fighting off symptoms of depression, encouraging physical activity or helping keep older adults mentally sharp.

Despite the rewarding nature of being a grandparent, grandparents also can experience challenges and have many things they need to consider to promote the best grandfamily relationships; for instance, fostering their grandchildren's development. This publication highlights information on strengthening grandfamily bonds. The first section addresses how grandfamily relationships change as children grow. The second section examines the three generations of connections in grandfamilies. The third section offers strategies to strengthen family communication.



# Grandfamilies Across Ages

Grandparent/grandchild relationships are mutually beneficial; strong relationships between grandparents and grandchildren can impact everyone's well-being. The type of relationship a grandparent has with a grandchild is constantly changing as grandchildren and grandparents get older. During each developmental stage the grandchild passes through, grandparents have a variety of things they can keep in mind to help promote strong relationships that are beneficial to all family members.

## Early Childhood (roughly birth to age 4)



The transition into grandparenthood is an adjustment for everyone involved. While grandparents are quite familiar with the roles of parenthood, adjusting to and learning the role of grandparenthood may take some time.

Grandparents of young children can have a large range of relationships with their grandchildren. Some grandparents may take on a supportive caregiving role with young grandchildren, providing regular or intermittent care for them. Whether grandparents provide care now and then or daily, they need to learn about the newest developments in child rearing practices and adapt to the choices that their children have made for raising their grandchildren. For young grandchildren, grandparents can play an essential role in supporting a child's most basic needs such as feeding, bathing, calming, and actively engaging and playing with them.

Grandparents who do not live close to their grandchildren can read to young children over the phone or through video chat and make an effort to stay updated on important milestones from afar. Grandparents can help the child learn and develop cognitively, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically regardless of their proximity to their grandfamily. Whether or not a grandparent takes on a caregiver role, the transition into grandparenthood has an impact on well-being for the grandparents, and the connections made to young grandchildren play an important role in providing the foundation to build the grandparent/grandchild relationship.

## Middle Childhood (roughly age 5 to 10)



As grandchildren develop into school-age children, grandparents may take on different roles. In these early school years, grandparents often still play a role in

helping provide care for grandchildren, although a primary role now becomes supportive play and learning. Studies have shown that, after their

parents, school-age children tend to get the greatest amount of support from their grandparents. In this stage of a child's life, grandparents can play a central and important role in influencing their grandchild's development and well-being. Not only the grandparents' well-being can benefit, but grandchildren also can benefit. For example, grandparents can play family-favorite board or card games with their grandchildren, improving mental skills and close bonds for grandparents and grandchildren.

Kids who have a close relationship with their grandparents tend to show more prosocial behaviors and see their grandparents as important role models in their lives. Grandparents who live far away can develop close relationships with their grandchildren by frequently calling, writing letters or playing games online or over videochat. This stage in a child's life is not only a fun and exciting time, but also an important step in the relationship when trust is strengthened and grandchildren can rely a lot on their grandparents.

### **Adolescence (roughly ages 11 to 17)**



During adolescence, grandparents can have a great influence on their grandchild's views of the world as well as their sense of security and well-being. During adolescence, many

teenagers seek independence from their parents, and if grandparents have developed a trusting relationship, they often can step in to provide additional support and guidance. The grandparent/grandchild relationship is able to grow in different ways during this stage as teenagers are interested to learn more about their family's values, history and traditions. This can be meaningful to grandparents because it provides the opportunity to pass down their views, ideas and any advice they have from their past experiences while further connecting to their grandchildren.

Grandparents also benefit from telling their stories by reviewing their own lives. The teenage years can be a challenging time in grandchildren's development, but a strong and communicative relationship with a grandparent can play a key role in supporting adolescent grandchildren through this developmental stage. Teens lead full lives on their own. Grandparents can stay relevant and involved by keeping up on technology, writing notes and letters, gifting old family photos or special family trinkets along with their stories, reading the same books, playing games on their devices or getting together for a movie night.

### **Young Adulthood (roughly ages 18 to 30)**



Relationships between grandparents and their adult grandchildren vary greatly from person to person in terms of the quality and function of the relationship. Once grandchildren have

reached adulthood, grandparents may have less of a caregiving and teaching role but still play an important role in providing support and guidance.

A close relationship with adult grandchildren is mutually beneficial for the grandparent and the grandchild. For instance, adults who report feeling emotionally close to their grandparents have fewer depressive symptoms. Also, grandparents who are close to their adult grandchildren are more likely to receive caregiving support from those grandchildren.

As grandchildren move through young adulthood, a new type of grandparenthood – great-grandparenthood – becomes increasingly likely. During their lifetime, about 50% of older adults will become great-grandparents. Once again, older adults are able to experience childhood through the eyes of their great-grandchild and see another generation be born into their growing family. The great-grandparent role can be one that is a bit more peripheral, but it still brings joy, feelings of giving back and creating a family legacy.



## Intergenerational Ties

In reality, grandparent/grandchild relationships are a three-generation family dynamic. The “middle” or parent generation also holds a key role within the grandfamily.

The parent generation tends to act as intermediary between the grandparent and grandchild, especially early in the child’s life. Grandparent/parent relationships can range from excellent to strained; many have their ups and downs. Recognizing that changes will occur through time and that the grandparent/parent relationship can greatly impact the grandparent/grandchild relationship is important.

A major factor that can help keep these grandparent/parent relationships strong is communication. Taking the time to develop healthy relationships with your grandchildren’s parents is a good start to being able to develop close ties with the grandchildren.

Communicating with your own children (and their parenting partners) can be difficult when you become a grandparent to their children. One key way to develop a healthy grandfamily relationship is to set and respect boundaries. Parents and grandparents should discuss expectations and roles. Remember that these roles may be new to all of you and will need refining and reminding as you go.

Things to consider and talk about: Are you willing to provide child care whenever your child wants you to? What type of guidance and discipline will be used? These and many other topics are important discussions to have each time something changes and your grandchild grows older. Try to put yourself in your children’s shoes and consider how you would have liked your parents’ relationship to be with your children as you raised them.

### *Strategies to Foster Strong Grandfamily Bonds*

- **Make time to connect by prioritizing communication and making time for conversations.**
- **Express affection and discuss your feelings.**
- **Share stories, life happenings and family history with one another.**
- **Plan special moments and events together.**
- **Remember and honor special days together.**
- **Laugh together and celebrate the fun moments in life.**



## Communication

Even though you have many ways to stay connected today, letting time slip by without making contact is easy. Grandparents realize that grandchildren have busy, full lives. Find ways to stay connected while learning new skills such as texting and videochatting (for instance, Facetime, Google Hangouts, Skype and Zoom). Ask your grandchildren and children what their favorite ways to communicate are, and then ask them to teach you to use it, too. Being able to show your family that you want to learn what they are doing to communicate with them can go a long way!

As a grandparent, you are the keeper of history and this is a great way to bond with your children and grandchildren. Consider fun ways to pass on family life lessons and memories. Pull out old photos or memorabilia and have younger kids guess who is in the photos. Carefully write names and relationships on the back of photos to preserve who is pictured. Invite grandchildren to try on hats, wedding dresses or sports or military uniforms if you still have them.

Make family recipes together and tell the story of how that food came to be important to your special events. Send the recipe and key ingredients to grandkids far away. Use a videochat platform to make the recipe together while being apart. Grandchildren will be interested in their family's history and the life you have lived, especially as they grow older and realize the significance of their family legacy.

### *Strategies to Improve Communication*

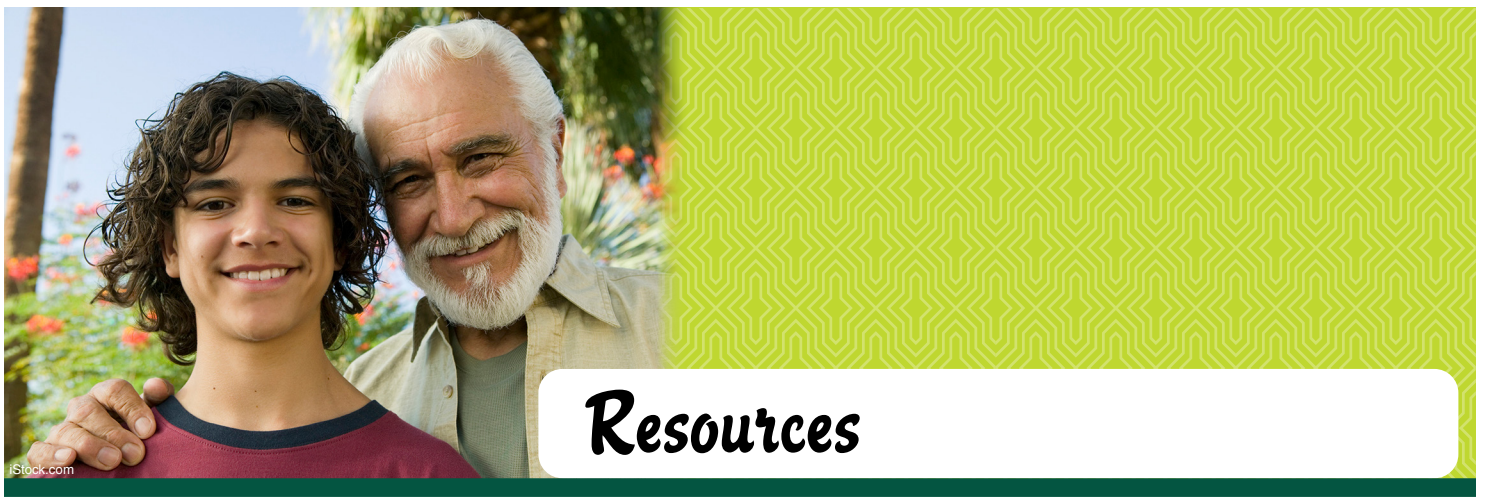
- **Be present and willing to listen. Give advice when appropriate, but also be willing to listen and provide support.**
- **Set a routine – consider scheduling weekly calls or check-ins.**
- **Remember, even a quick message can let someone know you care and are thinking of them.**
- **Send mail for special dates, but also just for fun.**
- **Talk about family history and shared stories.**
- **Find ways to connect face to face – whether in person or using technology.**



## Your Own Reflections

The relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren is very important in many aspects of each of their lives. Throughout both of their lifetimes things will change, but overall, a good relationship can make a big difference and improve the lives of both grandparent and grandchild.

- ? How do you feel about the level of communication you have with each of your grandchildren?
- ? How have your relationships with each of your children changed as they became parents?
- ? What is the best part of being a grandparent? What makes this role meaningful to you?
- ? What is the most challenging part of being a grandparent? What goals do you have to be an even better grandparent?
- ? Think back to a favorite memory you share with each of your grandchildren. Why do you think this is your favorite and most memorable?
- ? How did you feel about the level of communication you had with your grandparents growing up?
- ? Do you have any special memories of your grandparents? Can you replicate any of those experiences with your grandchildren?
- ? How do you hope to be the same as your grandparents? How do you hope to be different?



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## *The Grandfamily Game*

The relationship between a grandparent and grandchild can be very meaningful and fun. One way to strengthen those relationships is to communicate and share memories with each other. The Grandfamily Game is an easy way to get families building relationships by having fun and learning new things about each other.

### *Instructions*

- Print the cards.
- Pass the cards to the correct person (kids ages 4 to 12 can use the younger grandchild cards and those ages 12 and up can use the older grandchild cards).
- Take turns reading the cards and answering questions.
- Most importantly – listen and have fun!

You also can make the game more exciting by drawing part of your answer on a white board and having the rest of the group guess what it is. Once they guess, you can share what the question was and talk about it some more. You also can play the game even if you are not able to be in the same room as your family. All you need to do is call or video-chat your family and one person can ask the questions and you can take turns answering them.





*For the Grandparent*



*For the Grandparent*



*For the Grandparent*



What was school like for you as a kid?

Where were you born?

When you were young, what did you do for fun?



*For the Grandparent*



*For the Grandparent*



*For the Grandparent*



What is your favorite part of the day and why?

What toys or games were popular when you were a child?

Do you or did you have siblings? What were they like growing up?



*For the Grandparent*



*For the Grandparent*



*For the Grandparent*



Any advice you would give your children or grandchildren?

What is your favorite food and why?

Did you watch TV or see movies growing up?



*For the Grandparent*

What do you hope  
for your children and  
grandchildren?



*For the Grandparent*

What are some special  
memories with  
your children and  
grandchildren?



*For the Grandparent*

What music was  
popular when you  
were a teenager?



*For the Grandparent*

Have you ever lived  
anywhere else?  
Where has been your  
favorite place to live?



*For the Grandparent*

What are your favorite  
holiday traditions?  
Do you know  
how they started?



*For the Grandparent*

How did you get  
your name?  
How did you choose  
your child's name?



*For the Grandparent*

Tell me about your  
best friend.  
What do you look for  
in a friend?



*For the Grandparent*

What were you doing  
when you were the age  
that your grandchild  
is now?



*For the Grandparent*

What is the most  
important lesson you  
have learned?





*For the Older Grandchild*

What do you want to be when you grow up?  
How do you plan on getting there?



*For the Older Grandchild*

What is special about your grandparents?



*For the Older Grandchild*

What kind of music or podcasts do you like?



*For the Older Grandchild*

Do you have any advice or questions for your grandparent(s)?



*For the Older Grandchild*

Do you have a favorite memory with your grandparent(s)?



*For the Older Grandchild*

Where do you see yourself in five years?  
Ten years?  
Twenty years?



*For the Older Grandchild*

What is your favorite subject in school?  
Why?



*For the Older Grandchild*

What is your favorite meal that your grandparent(s) make?



*For the Older Grandchild*

What is your favorite pastime activity?



If you could have been born in a different decade, which decade would it be?



What is something you would want to change about the world to make it a better place?



If you had a theme song to your life, what song would it be?



What are some of your strengths?  
What are some of your weaknesses?



If you could write a book, what would it be about?



What are some of your goals?  
How do you plan to reach them?



Do you want to have children someday?  
What would you name them?



What are you grateful for today?



If you won a million dollars, what would you buy or do first?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

What do you want to be when you grow up?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

What is your favorite thing about having a grandparent?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

What is your favorite game?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

If you could have any superpower, what would it be?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

What is your favorite thing to do with your grandparent(s)?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

What is your favorite meal your grandparent cooks?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

What is the first thing you do when you get up in the morning?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

Do you have a favorite TV show? Do you think your grandparents(s) would like it?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

What is your favorite sport?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

If you were granted three wishes, what would they be?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

If you could travel back in time, where would you go?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

If you could be famous, what would you want to be famous for?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

Do you have a favorite holiday? Why is that your favorite holiday?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

If you could pick a new name, what would it be?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

What makes you happy? What makes you sad? What makes you angry?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

Do you think you are a good friend? Why do you think so?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

What makes your family special?

♥ *For the Younger Grandchild* ♥

If your family lived in a zoo, what animals would each family member be?

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