

Life's grand, but don't overdo it

Being a grandparent is one of life's special experiences. If you nod your head in agreement with a knowing smile, you probably understand what we mean because you are one. Being a grandparent involves reliving the magic of having little people come into the world. Suddenly these grandchildren are the most important things in the world to you.

But there's one vital and welcome difference between becoming a grandparent and becoming a parent. As a grandparent you can enjoy a playful and engaging relationship with your grandchildren that doesn't seem to have many constraints. What does it matter if occasionally you guiltily indulge in some hot chips together after school so the child is unlikely to eat the nutritious dinner waiting at home?

If you did that as a parent you would be frowned upon as being irresponsible, but if you do it as a grandparent it's a big treat and your misdemeanour is usually treated with an indulgent smile. After all, what are grandparents for but to spoil their grandchildren a little?

And there's the heart of the matter. Parents must discipline and take on the responsibility and problems of their children on a fulltime basis, but as a grandparent you can get the "best bits" and avoid much of the difficult stuff, even though you may well step in to help when asked to do so.

And why shouldn't you enjoy the pleasure of embracing you grandchildren's company wholeheartedly, secure in the knowledge you can give them back to their parents once you have both had some fun together? You have done your hard yards with your own children. All this assumes you are not in the situation of being grandparents who are sole carers for grandchildren, a topic discussed elsewhere on the site.

Having grandchildren gives you a new perspective, and often triggers memories of when your own children were going through a particular stage. You can just step back in time to "visit" that gorgeous baby stage, but unlike the first time around, you're not trapped there.

As a grandparent, you are the keeper of family memories for the grandchildren. Ask most adults lucky enough to have continuing relationships with their grandchildren about their memories, and there are bound to be family stories that were told to them when they were at their grandparents' knees as young children.

For a child to have a grandparent who thinks they are so special is a real gift. It's a challenge for grandparents to have this individual relationship with each grandchild if there are a lot of them, but it can be done. Love is an infinite quality that has a great deal of built-in elastic and it can stretch to be enough for any number of grandchildren. The challenge is to discover ways in which you can create your special relationship with each child.

Going to kinder and school Grandparent Days, watching Little Athletics or ballet concerts are ways in which grandparents can be special people to grandchildren. Grandparents usually have more time and patience than parents, and will spend time sitting and drawing, or pushing the swing at the park, or even making chocolate crackles.

There's also a benefit for your own children in having you in the grandparent role, because you can give them a break by stepping in occasionally to care for the kids.

But it's important that you remember their ways of disciplining may not be yours, because times have changed since your children were young and their ideas may be different. Try to keep up with current thinking and trust that your children will do they best job they can. Being a grandparent is a great privilege – enjoy it.

Survival tips

- **Being a grandparent is one of life's special roles.**
- **Enjoy stepping back in time to appreciate children without the continuing responsibility for them.**
- **Don't criticise your children's discipline methods. Quietly support them and trust they are doing the best job they can.**