

# THE GREATNESS OF GRANDPARENTING



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Grandparenting e-booklet  
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## **Introduction:**

The kind of grandparents portrayed in kids' storybooks is kindly old grey-haired folks. Granny is rotund, wears an apron and bun and sits in her rocking chair knitting socks or cooking copious piles of cookies for when the grandchildren come. Grandpa wears a plaid shirt and overalls, smokes a pipe and has little round glasses on the end of his nose. He spends most of his days in the garden growing carrots and planting flowers.

I am sure you relate to this picture, but would agree that it shows no resemblance to the grandparents of today. In those days they mostly retired from work and just puddle about until they died...often between 60 and 70 years of age.

Times have definitely changed. I only met my father's parents a couple of times, because way back in the 1950s nobody traveled far and they lived about 100 miles away. Both sets of grandparents lived through the great depression preceding the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. My father's parents lived in a very small town in Northern Tasmania. My grandfather, born in 1885, was a coal miner. His wife, my grandmother, had six children to raise almost entirely by herself. This was particularly hard as their oldest son was physically and mentally disabled. Theirs was a hard life and they probably appreciated resting in their senior years.

My mother's father was a supervisor in the Hydro Power Scheme in the same tiny village where we lived in the middle of Tasmania. I don't remember much about him because he always seemed to be working and he died young, but I do vividly remember my grandmother as a pretty little lady with a tinkling laugh, sparkly eyes and mauve colored hair.

## The evolving grandparent

Life since the 1950s has changed drastically in many ways. Why? Adults are living much longer, working much longer and are much more mobile. No longer are generations of families domiciled in one area. Families move with their jobs, their interests or just because they can. Shorter work hours and better pay allows people to take more vacation time and can afford more stuff for their own pleasure.

- ❖ More options: 60 years of age is the new 80 years of age. Adults' whole perception of their golden years is no longer sitting about waiting to 'pop off'. NO, they see another 30 years at least to do all the things they didn't have time to do before e.g. traveling overseas, camping vacations, new or extended hobbies, writing, painting and sports like golf and bowling. Some are lucky enough to become 'Snow Birds' and have summer and winter homes. Retirement schemes, apart from Government social security, have given many retirees the finances to enjoy later life.
- ❖ Less availability: Grandparents are not always available because they are working, traveling or do not live in close proximity to their grandchildren.
- ❖ Greater responsibilities: Some grandparents find themselves becoming full-time parents again as their children's marriages break up, they get involved in drugs, go to jail or some misfortune occurs leaving their grandchildren without parents.

## What is so great about grandparenting?



One could say that compared to parenting which carries all the responsibilities and expenses of 24-hour child-care, grandparenting is a breeze and a pleasure. Not including situations where grandparents take full custody of grand kids, there are many advantages to being that 'casual caregiver'.

### **You have time:**

- ❖ To give them your undivided attention.
- ❖ To teach them how to make stuff – how to cook, how to make a cart, how to make string puppets, build a sand castle and so on.
- ❖ To take them on fun adventures.
- ❖ To tell them about your life, your hobbies and your successes.
- ❖ To teach and model values e.g. being honest, loyal, caring, forgiving and sharing, to name a few.
- ❖ To listen to their stories, their dreams, their fears and worries.

- ❖ To widen their horizon of possibilities by encouraging their efforts and helping them to create and reach goals.
- ❖ To support them by watching them play sport.
- ❖ To join in their play – stimulate their imaginations e.g. become one of their pirate gangs or travel the globe with them in a cardboard box. Play tea parties or cops and robbers.
- ❖ To spend one-on-one time with each grandchild and really appreciate how they think, what they love and what they want to be when they grow up.

### **You have choices:**

Unless there is an emergency, you can pace yourself in regards to:

- a) Ability – you may be too tired or too stressed or be in some way disabled.
- b) Availability – you may have a job or have made other arrangements.
- c) Your wishes – you are in control of your own time. Your grandkids are an integral part of your life, but not your primary responsibility, so you should feel OK about saying, 'No' to requests for child-minding without having to give some excuse.

### **You have an invested future:**

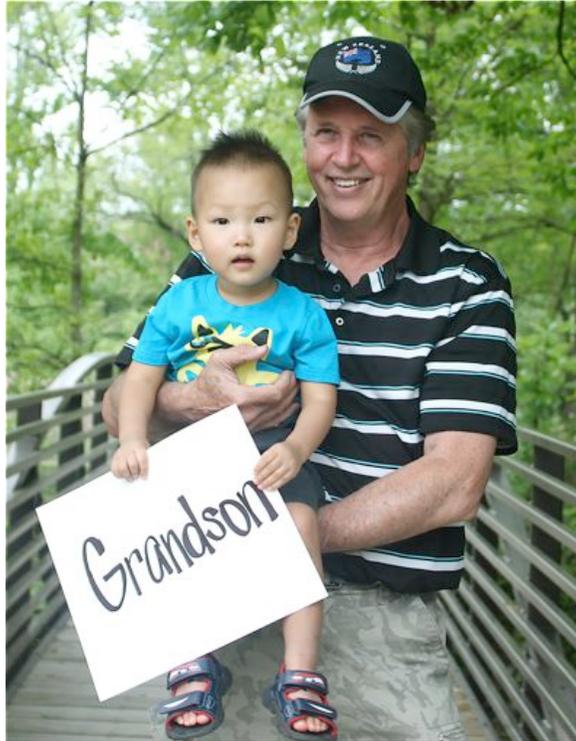
When you have worked all your adult life, the thought of retirement can be daunting. When you worked, you had an identity closely related to your job, but once you retire you may feel redundant.

### **Grandparenting gives you:**

- a) A sense of purpose, a spring in your step, a smile on your face, and a reason to get up every day. The greatest feeling of all is to be needed, an important spoke in the extended family wheel.
- b) A renewed sense of connection. Where you were less

available through your working years, there is now time to just enjoy being a greater part of wider family life.

- c) The opportunity to make a positive difference in your grandchildren's lives.



## **What are the challenges of grandparenting?**

1. If you are a working grandparent, you don't have the time and energy you would like or need to manage or care for your grandchildren.
2. If you are physically or emotionally disabled or stressed out by the amount of responsibility of child care, it is difficult to really enjoy the grandkids as you would want or like to.
3. If you are a single grandparent it is difficult to try and manage more than one 'speeding bullet' (toddler) at a time. Believe me, I know!!!

4. If you are a 'long-distance' grandparent, it becomes frustrating not being able to spend time with your dear grandchildren and to give them those much needed hugs and kisses (whether the grandkids want them or not!).
5. You can feel guilty for wanting to 'have a life' now you have freedom, rather than always being available for your grandkids.
6. You can feel resentful if your kids take you for granted in assuming you are always available to mind the grandchildren.
7. You can feel hurt when your kids don't take your advice about child-rearing practices. While they are an integral part of your life, you are not their parents and are not ultimately responsible for your grandchildren.
8. You can feel unwanted when your kids tell you to butt out of their decisions regarding their family.
9. You can feel jealous of the other grandparents who might see your grandchildren more or shower them with more stuff,
10. You can feel very lonely when your kids move away and you no longer have the face-to-face contact with your grandkids.

## **Gearing up for grandparenting.**

### **A. Be prepared.**

#### **Get fit.**

- ❖ Try to be as physically fit and rested so you can keep up with them.
- ❖ Be emotionally ready. Make it known if you don't feel up to minding the children on any given day. It can be stressful and the responsibility is great.

## **Child-proof the house.**

- ❖ Make your house childproof before they come. Lock dangerous chemicals away, partition off stairs, and remove sharp objects or items that might fall on them. Insert power point /outlet covers. Tie up dangling cords and leads. Remove jealous dogs and scared cats if necessary.

## **Have things organized for them to do.**

- ❖ Have plenty of activities organized, inside and out.
- ❖ Always have a full toy-box and recycle toys periodically so there are different things for them to play with.

## **Have the right food, drink and diapers on hand.**

- ❖ Make sure you have a stock of the appropriate foods, diapers, bottles and baby utensils.

## **Have the appropriate baby furniture.**

- ❖ Have a high chair, crib, bouncer, baby gate, stroller and whatever you need to ensure their safety and those things that will make you more comfortable in managing them.

## **Have the required car seats in your vehicle.**

- ❖ Ensure you have the correct baby seat for size and age, passed by safety codes.

## **Create rules for your home.**

- ❖ Set rules for what the grandkids may and may not do in your home. They need to learn your expectations and to respect you and your stuff.

## **Be prepared to get ‘down and dirty’!**

- ❖ There is nothing kids like more than to rough and tumble with you. Know that you might get covered in mud or sand and just because you are 60 something doesn't mean you are exempt from climbing through pipes and over fences!



Grandy being smothered in sand!

## **B. Follow the ‘grandparenting’ rules.**

### **Keep in step with your kids’ wishes.**

1. Know what your kids’ parenting style and disciplinary measures are and do the same. Ask about how they want you to discipline their children in your home. (Our daughter told us that if she was present she would discipline them, but if she was not there we should discipline them for the same things and use the same methods as she and their Daddy does). Ask parents if they are happy with your methods and accept their response.
2. Ask your kids about their family values and be sure to stick to them. If you let behavior slide at your home then kids get confused and will very quickly sum you up as a ‘soft touch’. That is only teaching kids double standards.

## **Play fair**

- ❖ Don't take sides between the kids and/or their parents.
- ❖ Don't make negative comments to the grandkids about their parents. You are criticizing their beloved parents and they get stressed out because they don't know what to do with the information.
- ❖ Don't play the "Don't tell Mommy" secrets game. It is teaching kids to be deceptive and they get stressed out.
- ❖ Don't show favoritism between grandchildren. Parents want to know you are an 'equal opportunity' grandparent.

## **Don't spoil the grandkids just because you can.**

- ❖ Don't keep buying them things or they will expect a 'surprise' every time they see you. It is a trap. I know!!!! You don't want to disappoint them, so you keep buying them stuff hoping they will love you more!

**Note:** Spoiling doesn't just refer to buying kids stuff. It is also overlooking negative behavior, and letting parent rules slide.

## **Be a great role model.**

- ❖ Your grandchildren adore you, so be the best example you can be, and model the person you would want them to become i.e. mature, responsible, fun-loving, ethical and a great example to their own kids in the future. That is your legacy to them.

## **C. Monitor your grandchildren's happiness.**

As a fairly objective observer, you can tell if your grandchildren are happy, anxious or angry. Kids cannot always articulate their fears to their parents and sometimes they are afraid to do so. Grandparents can be the voice of the grandchild if they have a healthy relationship with the parents.

When a new baby comes into the family and parents are finding it difficult to give enough attention to the older child, grandparents can take that role so the child does not feel left out.

Research shows that intergenerational relationships are a two, if not three-way, street. Grandparents often play an important and valued role in helping parents and grandchildren negotiate conflicts. Keep your communication lines open with the parents and grandchildren. They need to feel you are a safe person to talk to when they are concerned.

**Note:** If you think your grandchildren are in any danger of being abused in any way, by anyone, you have the responsibility to act quickly and appropriately.

- a) Talk to the child.
- b) Talk to their parent about your concerns.
- c) Report physical or emotional abuse to the appropriate authorities promptly even if the abuser is your own child.



Grandy, Zanny, the boys and their Mom all out enjoying the sunshine

## **Grandparenting tips from the 'pros'**

I asked a number of my friends who are grandparents the kinds of things their grandkids like to do with them. The following points were their responses:

### **1. What inside activities do your grandkids enjoy?**

- ❖ Cooking. Letting them help you make and ice cakes or muffins.
- ❖ Playing 'make believe' (using your kitchen like it's a restaurant; taking our orders and pretending to cook. We have to do the pretend eating and tell them how wonderful everything is).
- ❖ Making craft articles through sewing, knitting, clay modeling, play dough, or painting in watercolors on paper or canvas.
- ❖ Cuddling and reading to them.
- ❖ Just having conversations with them. Talking about when we were being raised and when their parents were growing up.
- ❖ Looking through photo albums and talking about the photos.
- ❖ Playing interactive games such as board or card games with them.
- ❖ Getting them to help you with chores. It can be made to be FUN!
- ❖ Playing with puzzles, and jigsaws.
- ❖ Playing hide and seek (our favorite game).
- ❖ Building with blocks, railway tracks and Lego.
- ❖ Having a big toy-box with lots and lots of stuff in it for them to play with.
- ❖ Supplying tins and containers that they can put things in.
- ❖ Doing anything that is different from what they do at home.
- ❖ Playing with interactive computer games, but only for a very short time. Set time aside for them so you do it with them. Discourage electronic devices where they go into their own little world, completely ignoring you, unless you need the rest! We need to encourage our grandkids to talk face-to-face as much as possible. They are fast losing the art of conversation.

- ❖ My grandkids love to wrap themselves up in my fluffy blanket and rock on my recliner chair when they get tired.

**Note:**

Your time is what they value most, so doing things with them is what they love. Make sure they feel safe and cozy when they stay overnight and have favorite things around them.

## **2. What outside activities do your grandkids love?**

- ❖ Swimming, hiking, biking.
- ❖ Any kind of ball game.



- ❖ Pretending games like making a house, a dam over water, cops and robbers and so on.
- ❖ Helping me with the garden and raking leaves and jumping in them.
- ❖ Trimming the monkey grass and picking flowers.
- ❖ Going on natural activities like bush walks.
- ❖ Water-fighting with plastic water guns and water slides.

- ❖ Walking the dogs. Throwing the ball for the dog.
- ❖ Playing on the trampoline.
- ❖ Playing on scooters.
- ❖ Playing golf.
- ❖ Shooting at targets.
- ❖ Climbing trees and making a tree hut.
- ❖ Picking flowers and making bouquets.
- ❖ Making toy car ramps down the hill.
- ❖ Playing in the dirt with sticks and plastic shovels so they can poke holes and fill their buckets.



A cute little girl playing in the mud while her parents looked on.

### **3. What are your grandkids' favorite adventures?**

- ❖ The zoo.
- ❖ Museum, art and car exhibits.
- ❖ Park playgrounds.
- ❖ The beach.

- ❖ Going out to eat.
- ❖ Feeding the ducks
- ❖ Going to the movies and plays (older kids don't always like plays).
- ❖ Boat rides.
- ❖ Train rides that they otherwise wouldn't do.
- ❖ Watching the planes fly in at the airport.
- ❖ Bouncing in Inflatable castles.
- ❖ Local kid-friendly adventure parks.
- ❖ Flying fox/zip lines.
- ❖ Watching them play their sport most weekends.
- ❖ Taking scooters and bikes to ride in places away from home.
- ❖ The Mall playground area for up to 5 year-olds.
- ❖ Visiting friends' homes to play with different toys for a change of environment.
- ❖ Camping with grandparents.



Grandy at the zoo with his grandsons

**Note:** Adventures away from home take time and energy so make sure you are up for it before you offer. Sometimes you face challenges you don't expect and get more than you bargain for!

Comment from a 77 year-old.

*“Recently my grandkids wanted me to squeeze through a hole in a netting fence, well above the ground just so we could take a shorter journey home and get that much promised ice-cream. Well, I said a firm, “No”, but then I thought, “Why not?” At 77 it was no mean feat, but I decided breaking one dodgy hip was the worst scenario and even then it would hurry the op along that I have been waiting so long for. So, with help from 5 exuberant kids we made it. What cheers went up! It was the highlight of a week with Nana. Relationships are earned, always.”*

#### **4. What personal limitations do you need to consider?**

Child-minding is a tough call when you are getting older. What are the challenges, both physical and emotional?

- ❖ You are usually worn out when they go home, but it is a good kind of tired. The grandchildren love nothing better than for us to just spend time and play with them. You aren't probably used to quite so much play, but it is great fun!
- ❖ The biggest thing is that we all come from different backgrounds, so we have to learn to be considerate and help each other.
- ❖ We have to realize that winning is not important, but having fun is. (We can teach our grandkids this important principle).
- ❖ It does make you tired, but if the grandchildren stay over night try going to bed at a similar time to them if you have them for several nights in a row. Just make sure the children

know the ground rules and keep them e.g. not going near the road, or not going anywhere unless they ask you first.

- ❖ Know what pushes your buttons so you can avoid anything that will unnecessarily create stress. Try not to have too many things happening at once to reduce physical and emotional overload.
- ❖ Create routines for when they stay over. This relieves the stress of getting caught unprepared and the kids will know what is happening, too.
- ❖ Pace yourself and recognize your limitations. You may have to try and stay fit so you can catch them. You have to feel comfortable about saying, “No, I can’t have the kids today.” Our kids need to know that we have a life as well.
- ❖ If you are under work stress you simply might not be able to help at that time. If you are going to your grandchildren’s home you could take some work with you and do it when the children have gone to sleep.
- ❖ Establish a 'Booking Calendar' so that you can see where the pressure points might be for babysitting.
- ❖ Avoid competing for love and attention against that of their parents. Play a major supportive role instead.

## **5. What do you want your grandkids to remember about you?**

- ❖ That I was 'there' when they needed me to provide help for the family unit.
- ❖ That I made some of their favorite foods when they stayed over.
- ❖ That I was fair and kept to their own family "rules' when looking after them.

- ❖ That I provided a safe place for them to come and play especially in regards to hazards: vehicles, fire, stove, water, electricity etc (without going overboard).
- ❖ That they knew we loved them and that they could always count on us.
- ❖ That we loved God and that He was the center of our lives.
- ❖ That we had no favorites. We loved all our grandkids the same.
- ❖ That I loved them so much and that they always looked forward to coming to my place.
- ❖ That they felt safe with me, emotionally and physically.
- ❖ That they were adored and very special.
- ❖ That they had fun with me.
- ❖ That I gave them a listening ear. That they knew they would be listened to and that I would share their joys, their troubles and fears no matter how large or small they were.
- ❖ Granny's yummy cakes and cookies.
- ❖ That I spoiled them from time to time.
- ❖ That I rejoiced in their successes and comforted them in their disappointments.
- ❖ That I loved them unconditionally and equally.
- ❖ That I accepted them just as they were and that this love would never fade.
- ❖ That we were sometimes crazy.
- ❖ That we laughed a lot.
- ❖ That we always gave them big hugs and squeezes.
- ❖ That we made a positive difference in their lives.

### **References:**

Susan Krauss-Whitbourne, Huffington Post

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-krauss-whitbourne/grandparents-connecting-grandchildren\\_b\\_3430807.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-krauss-whitbourne/grandparents-connecting-grandchildren_b_3430807.html)

## **About the author**

Sally is married with two grown children and four grandsons. She is a registered nurse, an author, parenting columnist, entertainer and recording artist, Co-director of Forefront Families, an avid knitter, technical writer, saleswoman and special friend to many people. Her passion, apart from being an entertainer, is to empower parents to raise extraordinary kids.

Sally was born in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia. Sally, her father and brother moved to New Zealand when she was nine years old. She lived in New Zealand until moving to Nashville, USA in 1994 with her husband and grown children to pursue her music career. It was here that Sally and her husband, Brian, felt called to help parents raise their children in such a way that those children would know their purpose and potential and become a joy to their parents.

On becoming grandparents it became clear that having grandchildren today is not the same as when our parents raised us. The world has changed and so have the distractions. Technology has burgeoned and grandparents have found it almost impossible to keep up with its development.

Despite many surface changes in the world since her own grandparents were alive, there are still a few things that remain constant, and it is these things that Sally addresses in this e-booklet.

We trust that you found this booklet helpful and that you will browse through Forefront Families' website and twice-weekly blog for further insight. Tell family members and friends about this free e-booklet and have them request a copy. We'll be happy to send them a copy.

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