

Being a grandparent

Your new role as a grandparent

Becoming a grandparent can bring the joys of loving and being loved, watching the children grow, and seeing yourself live on through your grandchildren. You might find that the arrival of a grandchild gives you a new sense of purpose. You might also have to work out where the boundaries are with the new parents.

Working out your new role

You can decide what kind of grandparent you want to be. However, it also depends on your situation.

You might still have a job, or you might be retired, planning to travel and looking forward to time to yourself. Your health, commitments and spouse are all important considerations too. Balancing your needs with those of your extended family can be a challenge, especially if you have grandchildren in more than one family.

On the other hand, you might want to spend more time with your grandchildren and help their parents – for example, by cooking meals or listening to worries. However, that's not always possible. For example, you might not see your grandchild regularly if he doesn't live close to you, or if there are problems with family relationships.

How your role as a grandparent changes

Your role is likely to change as your grandchild gets older. This is partly because your commitments might change, and also because your grandchild's needs and interests will change too.

This means that even if you can't help so much when your grandchild is little, you might be able to look forward to doing more as he gets older. For example, you might find it easier to share interests like cooking or music.

Your role might also change if your grandchild's family changes – for example, when they welcome a new baby or a parent starts a new job. This can lead to the family needing more, or less, support from you, depending on the situation.

As you get older, or if you have health problems, you might need to adapt your time with the grandchildren to quieter activities. Reading and playing board games could be good options.

Tips for being a grandparent

Here are some ideas to help you become the grandparent you want to be:

- You could start by thinking about what you'd like to do and what you're able to do. For example, you might be keen to spend time with your grandchildren while their parents are around, but you're not ready to look after them alone just yet. Or you might be happy to look after your grandchildren all day while their parents are at work.

- Before your grandchild is born, talk with the parents-to-be about your feelings. Listen to their ideas about how you could help – and share your ideas too. Show you're willing and share your expectations about what you think you can do.
- No one benefits if you run yourself into the ground. So be positive about contributing, but be upfront with your children about your health, energy levels and other commitments. If you're concerned about taking on too much, a trial period might be a good idea. For example, 'Let's try it for a month and see how it goes'.
- Let your household standards slip a bit and put away the precious ornaments. This can help you relax more and enjoy your time with your grandchild. You know from being a parent how short these years will be.
- If you're working and you want to help with child care for your grandchildren, talk with your children and employer about possible work arrangements. For example, you could adjust start and end-work timings in order to send your grandchildren to child care or preschool and pick them up.
- Looking after yourself with regular exercise, rest and a healthy diet will help you keep up with grandchildren – and just enjoy your life.