



**Age + Action**  
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 National Council on Aging

**A Grand Plan: National Survey Data on the Experience of Grandparents Who Care For Grandchildren**

Rebecca Parlakian, MA

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 Early connections last a lifetime

**A Grand Plan: National Survey Data on the Experience of Grandparents Who Care For Grandchildren**

Rebecca Parlakian, Senior Director of Programs, ZERO TO THREE

Visit our Grandparenting home page at [www.zerotothree.org/grandparents](http://www.zerotothree.org/grandparents)

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## Our Agenda

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- To describe the prevalence of grandparents as care providers for children under 5
- To share how grandparents view their caregiving role
- To provide recommendations for families and organizations that serve them

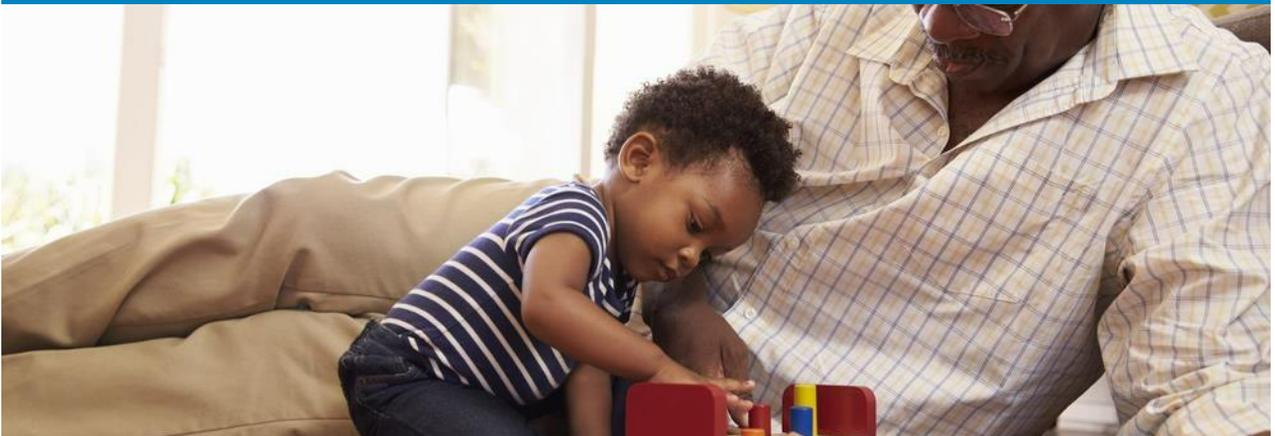
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## Grandparents are a cornerstone of child care for children under 5.



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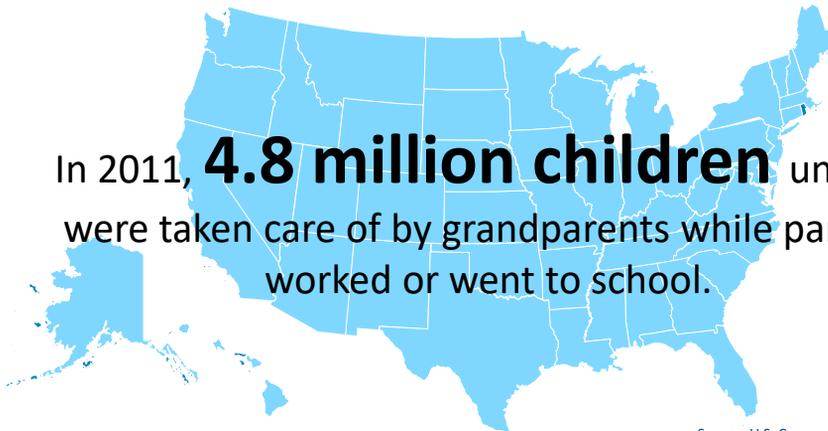
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# Grandparents as Child Care Providers



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In 2011, **4.8 million children** under 5 were taken care of by grandparents while parents worked or went to school.

Source: U.S. Census, 2013

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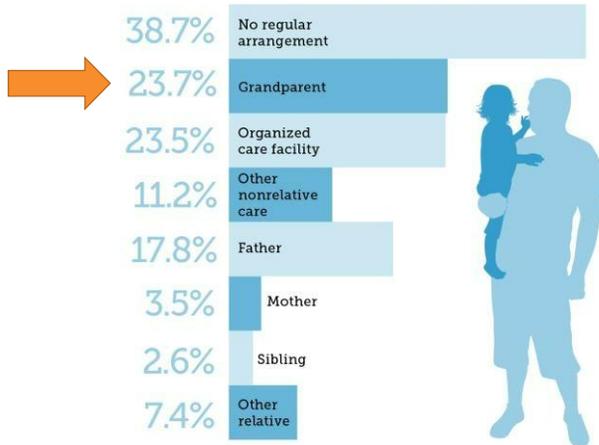
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# Grandparents as Child Care Providers



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Care for Children Under 5, Spring 2011



Grandparents care for as many children under 5 as are enrolled in formal child care programs: **24%**.

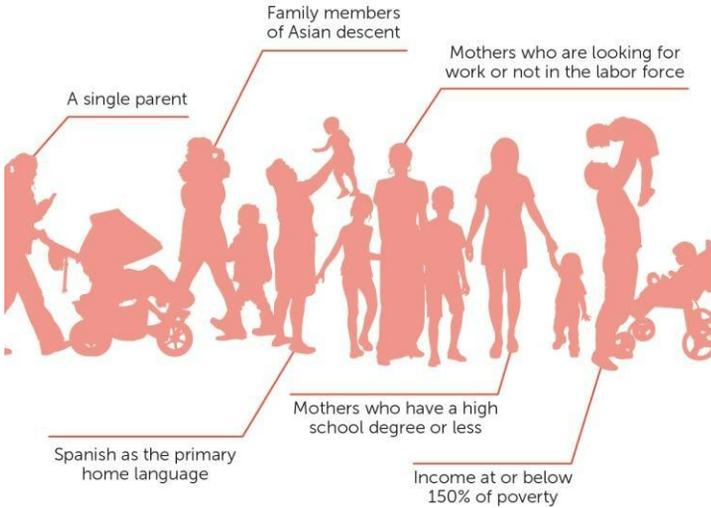
Source: U.S. Census, 2013

Note: percentages of children in specified arrangements exceed 100% because of multiple arrangements.  
 \* U.S. Census Bureau, 2013

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# Grandparents as Child Care Providers



Relative care in a child's home is a more common primary arrangement for infants in households with one of these characteristics.

Source: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, 2009.

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# A Reminder: Today's grandparents aren't old. . .



The average age for first-time grandparenthood is 52.

Photo: © Kawai Street Studios

Source: Jayson, Sharon (2016). Need a Babysitter? Don't Count On Grandma. *The New York Times*, August 9, 2016. <https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/08/09/need-a-babysitter-dont-count-on-grandma/>

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## A Reminder: Today's grandparents aren't old. . .

The average age for first-time grandparenthood is 52.



Tina Fey is 48.

Photo © Kwei Street Studios

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## A Reminder: Today's grandparents aren't old. . .

The average age for first-time grandparenthood is 52.



George Clooney is 57.



Tina Fey is 47.

Photo © Kwei Street Studios

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## A Reminder: Today's grandparents aren't old. . .



The average age for first-time grandparenthood is 52.



George Clooney is 57.



Tina Fey is 48.



Chris Rock is 53.

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## What do grandparents say about their role as child care providers to their grandkids?



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## Grandparenting Focus Groups



### Groups' characteristics:

- Los Angeles area, Spring 2017
- Intimate setting with 5 or 6 people per group
- Participants provided at least 15 hours of care per week for children under six years
- Selected for racial diversity and middle- to low-income, included three grandpas
- One group was conducted in Spanish

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## A Grand Plan: National Grandparenting Survey



- 1000 online quantitative questionnaires completed by grandparents who care for their grandchildren (5 years old or younger) at least 15 hours a week
- Within the 1000 completes, key demographic segments (Hispanic and African-American grandparents) were over-sampled in order to provide adequate sample to analyze these sub-groups separately

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## Key Idea #1: Feeling the Love



- “They are my compass; they’re my life. They have infused my life with life. It’s the truth. . . they have given me a reason to live.” –Maria del Carmen
- “It’s love without commitment. . . [with grandchildren], you enjoy them. . . I think it’s even better than being a mom. It’s very enjoyable!” –Maria
- “I have a son that’s 22. He’ll be 23, this year. For him to be a black man, from me, a single black woman raising a black male child, I was terrified.... I didn’t want to lose my son to the streets. I was very hard on my kids. I still am. I’m still hard...I still have a high expectation. I just get to love my grandson. I don’t have to be the disciplinarian.” –Jael

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## Like Eating Chocolate



I always say that having grandkids is like eating chocolate and not getting fat. You can just eat as much as you want. They’re just so much fun. They’re just so enjoyable, but you never gain weight.

-Yolanda

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## It's About Love – Not Money

- **98%** of survey respondents agree that they “love being a grandparent”
- **94%** agree that they “love caring for their grandchildren”
- **89%** say they are satisfied with the current caregiving arrangement
- **80%** are not paid for their time providing child care—rather, grandparents feel rewarded by:
  - Spending time with grandchildren on a regular basis (89%)
  - Being able to influence and shape grandchildren’s early experiences (76%)
  - Ensuring their grandchild gets the best care (74%)



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## Key Idea #2: Honoring the Commitment



- “My daughter asked me, and I accepted, because I didn’t want her to struggle like I did with my kids.” -Emma
- “I do it out of love for my daughter as well as love for my grandson. The grandson is the dividend. . . As a single parent, [my daughter] turned to us and said, ‘Would you like to join us out here, in California?’ I said, ‘That sounds pretty good to me.’” -Carl
- “As mothers and fathers do, we stepped right in. . . into that role. . . When she needs us, when they need us. We just said: ‘This is what we have to do.’” -Pat

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## Not a babysitter or a caregiver or a child care provider...

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- Cecelia: Joy...I see it as a joy.
- Debbie: Yes.
- Jael: I don't *babysit* my grandson.
- Pat: Right.
- Jael: I *spend time* with my grandson.
- Pat: Right.
- Kim: The other word they're saying is "caregiving," but we're not actually caregiving...
- Jael: We're spending time.
- Pat: Right.
- Kim: We're spending time. Just take that out of context of "caregiving." We're the grandparents. We're –
- Jael: Loving spending time.
- Debbie: Loving our children.
- Carl: Yes, helping raise them up.
- Cecelia: We don't feel like we're caretaking.
- Debbie: "Caregiving," for me, is like taking care of my elderly mother. My grandchildren, it's just a joy.

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## Let's Watch



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## Key Idea #3: Hard-earned wisdom that comes from years of perspective and experience



- Of course, when we're parenting and we have our children, we are experimenting. We're raising them...We're trying to learn and trying to know. When the grandkids come along...that gives us, also, another opportunity to work at it, through them. – Pat
- We're a lot more relaxed. We realize things are going to be okay. When you're young, you're like, "Oh my God, what if this, that?" You're just worried about everything. And as you get older, you realize – you know what? It is going to be okay...You have more of a view looking back at it and going, "Why was I so worried all the time? It's so silly now." -- Yolanda

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## Confident and Caring, Focused and Patient



- 81% of grandparents say they are happy with the quality of care they provide grandchildren.
- Grandparents report they offer:
  - More patience (70%)
  - A clearer sense of "what's important" (67%)
  - More time to focus on grandchildren than they did on their children (65%)
  - The ability to be more indulgent than they could be as parents (63%)

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## Key Idea #4: Conflicts emerge in every family.



Photo © iStock/Street Studios

- My son, I call him Dr. Spock. He knows everything. . . I have no input there.
- I leave the final word to my daughter, but I will give my opinion...She'll think about it later...and then they respect your opinion or do it the way they feel is best. And usually it's...my way.
- Sometimes I say, "I think you guys were a little too hard." They'll say the reason why, and I'll...explain [what I think], and then, "I see where you are coming from, Mom." And her husband, we'll discuss things, not in front of [the grandchildren]... Then [we find a] happy medium, "Okay. We're on the same page."

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## Conflicts Simmer Under the Surface

- Almost half (48%) of the grandparents surveyed feel some level of disagreement/tension between generations
- Areas of disagreement include:
  - Handling tantrums (31%)
  - Navigating mealtimes (27%)
  - Managing screen time (27%)
- Grandparents in multi-generational households report:
  - Experiencing more stress (26% vs. 19%) and
  - More tension/disagreements (57% vs. 45% ).



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## Let's Watch



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## Where do the conflicts lie?



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### • Food Choices

- [My daughter's rule is] that they shouldn't eat candy. No candy. But I always have candy hidden around. (Laughs) I tell my daughter, "They didn't eat candy, it's true," but they did eat candy. (Laughs) --Rosaura

### • Behavioral Expectations

- It's hard to watch her disciplining skills, versus mine. I just tell her she should pick her battles, with the three-year-old, because he is very strong-willed. He has a temper. He's going to be her...challenge. I tell her, "Just pick your battles with him because you can't get frustrated over every little thing." --Cecelia

### • Media Use

- They can unlock the phones. The challenge is, 'No. Put it down.' We're going to go outside, like the way I grew up... Sometimes they battle with you, and they say, 'Grandma didn't let me go and play on my...' Nope. Grandma didn't. It's just not going to happen. --Kim

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## Stages of Parenthood: Nurturing

Shutterstock / Jaina Lopes



| Who    | Stage 1          | Stage 2                 | Stage 3                            |
|--------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Parent | Image-Making     | Nurturing               | Authority                          |
| Child  | Conception-Birth | Birth – 18 to 24 months | 18 to 24 months to 48 to 60 months |

Galinsky, 1987

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## Stages of Parenthood: Authority

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| Who    | Stage 1          | Stage 2                 | Stage 3                            |
|--------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Parent | Image-Making     | Nurturing               | Authority                          |
| Child  | Conception-Birth | Birth – 18 to 24 months | 18 to 24 months to 48 to 60 months |

Galinsky, 1987

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## Most grandparents try hard to be sensitive to boundaries.



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- Make sure the parents know their opinions come before yours as far as parenting goes...I respect my daughter's opinion first, whether I like it or not. – Vivian
- Just know your role. Those are not your children, even though they came from your child. That's their responsibility, and there's a time for you—your time is over, so you're like a – maybe a guardian or a guide for them. It's not your duty to raise them. That's what [your children] are for. --Jacquelyn

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## Let's Watch



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## Approaching Child-Rearing Discussions with Adult Children



- In African-American families, 70% of grandparents agree that it's "my house, my rules" when it comes to caregiving for young children, compared with 56% of the total population.
- Hispanic grandparents (60%) reported more tension between generations than did grandparents in the survey as a whole (48%).
- Grandparents with a college education are more likely to disagree with their grandchild's parents on child-rearing strategies (58%) compared to grandparents with a high school diploma (44%).
  - But—they are more likely to leave the final decision to the grandchild's parents (74% vs. 64% ) and to follow parents' rules when caring for a grandchild (64% vs. 50%).

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## Balancing Experience and Learning-on-the-Job



- Let's take a 2-minute reflection:
  - Half the room consider the challenges of negotiating caregiving boundaries from **the parent's perspective**
  - Half the room consider the challenges of negotiating caregiving boundaries from **the grandparent's perspective**

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## Key Idea #5: Grandparents are not always aware of key changes in caregiving practices.



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- I mostly look at my own experiences. I had five kids, and now I am applying the same experience to my grandkids. -Lina
- I'm being educated by my daughters...You don't lay babies on the stomach. You lay them on the back. I said, "Oh, isn't that different now?" So I'm learning whether I want to learn or not. -Jacquelyn
- The first day I took care of my grandson, I told [my daughter], "You know what? I spanked him...Because I don't care for him hitting me. For as long as he's with me, I won't let him hit me." --Emma
- A couple spankings [don't] traumatize anyone. --Rosaura
- [My housemate] told me that you have to talk to the kids a lot. You don't need to hit them. --Ligia

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## Key Idea #6: Grandparents are online!



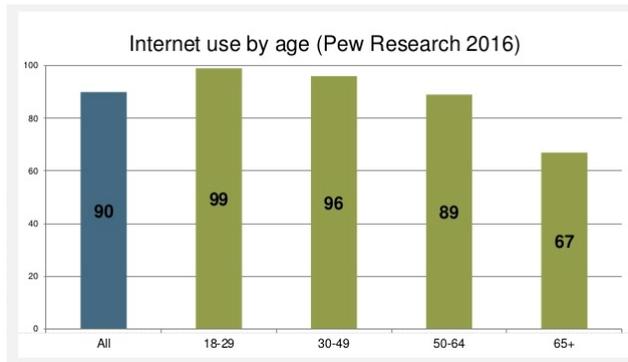
- "Things have changed since the time we had our own kids. I'll Google it. It's like 'Wow, we didn't have that when you guys were young.' It's different...all these modern things you can get for a child." -Debbie
- "I know a lot of people that are very old when they become grandmas. They say things like 'In my time, we didn't use cell phones. I don't know how to use GPS.' I can still learn more. I'm not all that outdated." -Rosaura



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## Online Usage Rates among Older Adults: High and Growing



89% of adults ages 50-64 use the Internet.

67% of adults ages 65+ use the Internet.

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/02/09/digital-divides-feeding-america/>

Source: Rainie, Pew Research Center, 2017

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## What are Grands Googling?



- **Discipline and Development Info:** How to handle their temper tantrums, how not to give in to a toddler, best foods for a toddler, how to help them potty train, stuff like that. --Cecelia
- **School Readiness info:** What other educational things can I get for him, that would help him in school? --Kim
- **Safety info:** I Google stuff like "the best car seat..." What's the rating and how was all the feedback? For anything I purchase for them, I do look at that because it's been a while. --Debbie
- **Toileting info:** YouTube... For example, when taking the kids to the bathroom, it shows you how to do it. --Ligia



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# What Sources of Info Do Grandparents Turn To?



| Tiers of Trusted Information Sources           |     |
|--|-----|
| Experiences raising my own kids                | 54% |
| My grandchild's parents                        | 37% |
| Medical professionals/the pediatrician         | 32% |
| My spouse/partner                              | 28% |
| Other family members/friends                   | 26% |
| Other grandparents/peers                       | 22% |
| My faith, religious leaders or religious group | 19% |
| Teachers, other child care professionals       | 18% |
| Google searches                                | 18% |
| My other children                              | 16% |

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# Survey Says... Topics Grandparents are most interested in



| Topics of Interest                    |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Educational activities                | 35% |
| Local activities/outings places to go | 30% |
| How to reduce challenging behavior    | 30% |
| Foster self-control & social skills   | 28% |
| Effective discipline methods          | 26% |
| Help toddler be ready for school      | 25% |

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## How Can Your Programs Engage With Grandparents?

### Blue Sky Brainstorming:

- What engaging, grandparent-focused activities could your centers/programs offer?
- What is one goal or learning outcome you'd want grandparents to achieve from attending?



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## Key Idea #7: Connecting to the Past, Investing in the Future



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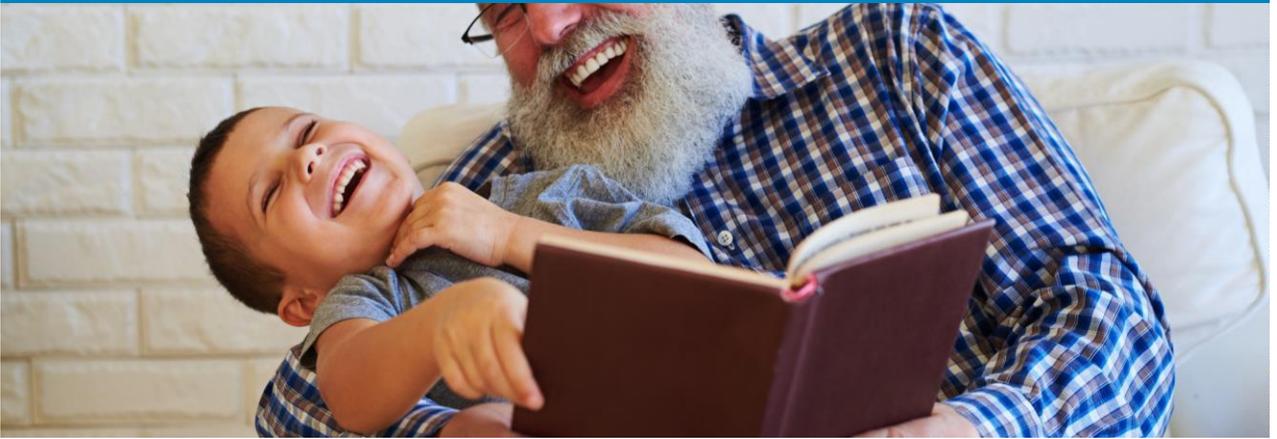
Photo © Kiwi Street Studios

- “My hope for my grandson is that he is a game-changer...I want him to be a trailblazer, whatever that means to him.” -Jael
- “[My hope] is education and safety. I can’t draw a line between those two, because I didn’t have much of either.” -Renoir
- “[My dreams for them?] To me, whatever they set their minds to do...just to work and live out of integrity, to be honest, to be truthful, to treat people right, and to do whatever their hearts desire.” –Pat

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## Recommendations for families and organizations that serve them



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## Meet Grandparents Where They Are...



- Senior centers
- “Mommy and Me” classes
- Community parent-child programs
- Preschool programs
- Early intervention programs
- Community groups in their houses of worship
- Children’s ministries
- Library story hours
- Hospital “becoming a grandparent” classes



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## And Offer Compelling Experiences.

- Design events and programs that recognize and celebrate the contributions of grandparents.
- Plan activities that include more than one generation (grandparents & grandkids; grandparents, parents, & grandkids).
- Elevate the expertise of grandparents.
- Use a light touch when offering child-rearing advice.
- Include opportunities for grandparents to socialize.
- Work within existing systems that grandparents know, trust, and use.



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## Films & Friendships: Launching the *Movie Night Toolkit*

- In partnership with NCOA, we have developed the **Movie Night Kit**
  - Materials needed for a Movie Night screening
  - Agenda and instructions for activities
  - Schedule/timing
  - PPT slides (optional)
  - Sample Invitation and marketing materials
  - Access to our *Grand Plan* videos

[www.zerotothree.org/grandparentmovienight](http://www.zerotothree.org/grandparentmovienight)



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[www.zerotothree.org/grandparentmovienight](http://www.zerotothree.org/grandparentmovienight)



Home • Resources & Services

## Host a Grandparent Movie Night!

Share ZERO TO THREE's grandparenting films and resources with the grandparents in your community by hosting a "movie night" (or day!). We have everything ready for you: A schedule for the event, group activities (with instructions!), promotional materials, a sample letter to invite community leaders, and take-home handouts for attendees. Download all of the resources right here!



### IN THIS SERIES

1. The Grand Plan: Grandparent Resources



Instructions for Movie & Conversation Event

[LEARN MORE](#)



Hosting Movie Night? Download Your PowerPoint

[LEARN MORE](#)

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Honor the experience grandparents bring, but share information on critical changes.



## The Grandparent Guide: Safe Sleep, Sweet Dreams

by Sarah MacLaughlin

Grandparents play a major role in raising the next generation. Did you know that grandparents provide care for 24% of kids under 5 years old while their parents work? If you're a grandma or grandpa in this role, you've probably noticed that a lot remains the same from one generation to the next. You're already an expert at raising young children. But you've probably also noticed that a few things have changed since you were a parent.

Here's the latest news on sleep safety for young children.

What you need to know

- It's recommended that babies up to 6 months old sleep in the same room with their parents in a crib, bassinet, or co-sleeper—a three-sided crib that attaches to the parents' bed—and always on a flat and firm surface. Experts say car seats and swings should not be used for regular sleep. It's also not advisable to hold the baby while they sleep if there is any possibility you may fall asleep too.



5 handouts specifically for grandparents

- What's New? What's the Same?
- Limit-Setting for Little Ones
- Making the Most of Mealtimes
- Safe Sleep, Sweet Dreams
- Making the Most of Everyday Moments

[www.zerotothree.org/grandparents](http://www.zerotothree.org/grandparents)

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## Support families' capacity to share the care across generations.



### If You Only Knew: A Tool for Grandparent Caregivers



by Rebecca Delavan, Sarah MacLaughlin, and Kathy Kramer

One out of four preschool children is cared for by a grandparent while his parents work or go to school. There are many benefits when grandparents care for young children, but when more than one generation is involved in child care, communication can be a challenge. Even when relationships are warm, sharing the care can stir up strong feelings. Parents may worry that their child prefers to be with their grandparents, rather than with them. Parents may also worry that grandparents are better at parenting than they are. Grandparents may struggle to establish good boundaries. And, of course, conflicts may arise over child-rearing approaches.

#### Uses and Goals of This Tool:

1. To provide a way to think about the topic of "sharing the care" across generations and provide guidance for dialogue about the shared tasks of caregiving.
2. To offer guidance and relief for families' conflicts.
3. To help grandparents and their adult children share what they appreciate about each other.
4. To offer caregiving adults the chance to share struggles and worries about their roles and the children in their care.



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*"If You Only Knew"* tool to guide families in sharing strengths, communicating concerns, and problem-solving together

*The Grand Plan: Planning Tips for Sharing the Care*, with guidance on issues to discuss with adult children before sharing the care

[www.zerotothree.org/grandparents](http://www.zerotothree.org/grandparents)

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## Executive Summary and Infographics



### Grandparents as Caregivers: By the Numbers



Today's grandparents are more than occasional visitors and the beloved bearers of treats. Grandparents play a significant role in raising the next generation. Here, we look at grandparent caregiving by the numbers.

#### Big Numbers

In 2011, 4.8 million of America's 20.5 million preschool children were **routinely cared for by a grandparent** while parents worked or attended school. **That's 24% of children under 5 years old!** The care provided by grandparents is an essential ingredient in raising the next generation—grandparents nurture and teach as many children as formal child care programs do.



- "7 Things You Should Know about Grandparents" provides highlights of our findings and recommendations for organizations serving grandparents.
- Additional survey resources and executive summary.
- Infographics provide data and further thoughts on grandparenting.
- [www.zerotothree.org/grandparents](http://www.zerotothree.org/grandparents)

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Thank you for joining us!



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Please Stay In Touch!



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