

Grandparents - National Families Week

It is widely recognised that the role of Grandparents has changed significantly over the last century.

With an increase in two-wage households and a rise in single-parent families, Grandparents are expected to do more than provide a holiday from the rules and routines of their grandchildren.

Skipped-generational homes where grandparent/s gain custody over grandchildren is also more common. Parenting becomes a necessity at a time when the rewards of a lifetime of work are expected. Grandparents who are responsible for the part-time or full-time care of their grandchildren often find it difficult to adjust to their new roles and feel burdened by it.

What is important to remember are the many benefits that intergenerational relationships have on both children and elders.

Having regular and meaningful contact with younger members of the family is said to improve physical health, communication and memory, provide opportunities to learn new skills, and reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. Children that have regular access to seniors as mentors gain a positive understanding of the ageing process and are less likely to engage in self-destructive behaviours.

Activities that provide a positive connection between grandparents and grandchildren can be aimed at staying active like gardening, imaginative play, dress-ups, or dancing. Telling stories, cooking, and playing games can help develop and improve cognitive skills for both grandparents and grandchildren.

For those who have gone through a life-changing event where the role of being grandparent extends to include parental responsibilities, it is important to seek help and support so that the adjustment is beneficial to the whole family.



Tips for grandparents with part-time or full-time care of their grandchildren:

- If you find yourself having to parent your grandchild or grandchildren because of a major disruption in their lives such as parental separation, illness, abuse or abandonment, it is helpful to create a secure and dependable home life. Routines that are easy to follow and not too challenging make the child feel more secure because they can predict what will happen next and do it without getting upset.
- Be informed of your grandchild/s stage of development. Throughout childhood and adolescents, there are significant changes in thinking and feeling due to big changes in the brain and their growing bodies. Matching up expectations with what your grandchild is physically and emotionally capable of will save a lot of frustration for you both.
- If your grandchild or grandchildren have experienced traumatic events they may act out confusing or conflicting feelings in negative ways. They may fight and argue with others, withdraw completely or behave in risky ways. What's important to remember is the child's need for comfort, safety and protection. Expect to have a difficult time and react to any conflict in ways that make the child feel safe.
- Realise that children and adolescents can understand the differences between two households. The more consistent grandparents are with rules and routines in their own home, the better the children are able to adjust when transitioning between homes. Try to avoid having arguments over forcing change in either home, rather see it as an opportunity for grandchildren to learn from and accept differences.



As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support. You can call Relationships Australia WA on 1300 364 277 or visit www.relationshipswa.org.au

4families - If you live in Albany, Bunbury, Busselton, Cockburn, Kwinana, Mandurah, Manjimup, Margaret River or Rockingham you can get free support through our 4families service.

4Dads - The 4Dads program offers information, education, referrals and support for fathers of children up to 18 years in the Mandurah and Pinjarra areas.

Education - Our professional facilitators offer a range of courses to help you address parenting challenges.

Counselling - We provide counselling for families, including group and individual sessions. Our counsellors are experienced and skilled in dealing with family relationship challenges and can help support families to assess their needs, identify areas for change, better understand and relate to each other, restore trust and communication and to ultimately strengthen relationships within the family unit.