

Grandparent issues

There are approximately 14 million grandparents in the UK. One in every three people over the age of 50 years old is a grandparent.

Grandparents, great aunts and uncles, and great grandparents have always played a positive part in young people's lives, often providing valuable additional role models.

The strength of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren often lies in being a step removed from the parents. Grandparents can have a continuing involvement in family life and stay in touch with a child's world without the responsibility of parenting. Grandchildren can have a safe way to move beyond the confines of the parental home; sometimes away from tensions within the immediate family.

Providing childcare for your grandchildren

In the past two generations, the number of children being cared for by their grandparents has increased substantially from 33% to 82%. Almost two-thirds of all grandparents regularly look after their grandchildren. This doesn't mean that every grandparent wants or feels able to look after a young child.

The cost of nurseries and childminders can be very expensive, meaning that many parents often turn to grandparents for help with childcare. Grandparents providing childcare for their grandchildren save working parents approximately £6.8 billion nationally in childcare costs.

Of course, many grandparents look after their grandchildren for enjoyment and the opportunity to see their grandchildren regularly, as well as because their parents are unable to afford the childcare costs. It is a big decision though as the commitment you make enables parents to return to work and the employer then relies upon them to contribute to their workforce.

Grandparents who are looking after their grandchildren can now claim up to £2,300 extra towards their state pension from 1st October 2020.

Discussing the arrangements with your family

If you are going to be involved in looking after your grandchildren on a regular basis, talking things through with your family is vital to avoid any misunderstandings about how and when you are going to look after them. You need to be honest about your views, your time, your priorities, so your family has the opportunity to respect your needs as well.

Also, things do change over the years, so it is good to agree to review the arrangement every so often. Your family may have more children and hope that you'll be able to look after more than

one grandchild. At one time you may have been happy to do some housework at the same time as looking after your grandchild, but this may change as you get older.

If you are going to start looking after your grandchildren on a regular basis, the following list may be useful things to consider:

1. Where and when: What are the hours involved? Will they be the same each week? Will I look after my grandchild (or grandchildren) at my house or at theirs? Can I take a day off, and, if so, how much notice is needed? Is there someone else who can provide cover, especially at short notice, for example if I'm ill?

2. Trial period: Many people say that the best thing to do is to have a trial period and then to review things. You may feel that you don't get enough free time to pursue other interests, or that you get too tired.

3. Extras: Will you be expected to feed the pets, help out with laundry or other housework, or cook meals? You may be put off, not by looking after your grandchildren, but because you feel overloaded with other expectations.

4. Family time: Talk through how you'll still be a family. Some grandparents feel that they miss out on 'family time' once they're helping with childcare, as they only get to see their grandchildren and children as part of the childcare arrangement.

5. Safety: If you're going to be looking after your grandchild (or grandchildren) in your own home, you'll need to think about safety issues. Ponds, glass tables, and low unlocked cupboards with household products in can all be potential hazards.

6. Childcare style: Parenting styles come and go, so you may not see eye to eye with your children on how to look after your grandchildren. You all need to be honest on what you feel is important, respecting your children's views on discipline, sweet-eating, watching television and playing.

7. Costs: Who will pay for treats, meals and outings?

Activities to do with your grandchildren

There are lots of activities that you can join in with your grandchildren, many of which are free.

Parent and Toddler Groups (closed at present)

These groups offer play opportunities for children under the age of five years old, as well as the opportunity to mix with others. There are approximately one hundred toddler groups in Newcastle.

[Newcastle Action for Parent and Toddler Groups Initiative \(NAPI\)](#) list all the local groups in the City.

Toy Libraries

These are closed at present.

There are also a number of Toy Libraries in Newcastle, which loan out toys, books and games for

children to play with at home. Contact [Newcastle Action for Parent and Toddler Groups Initiative \(NAPI\)](#) to find out if there is a toy library near you.

Libraries

Many of the [libraries in Newcastle](#) have holiday activities for children and story time sessions for younger children.

Other ideas

For many other ideas, see our section on [Children's activities](#)

[Proud Grandparents](#) website offers more information on helping to look after your grandchildren, including topics such as dealing with a grandchild's misbehaviour, gift ideas and instilling self-esteem in grandchildren.

If your grandchildren are living with you

An estimated 200,000 grandparents in the UK have grandchildren living with them because of their son or daughter has:

- [mental health problems](#)
- [substance misuse](#)
- [disability](#)
- [bereavement and grief](#)
- imprisonment
- disappeared.

You may have to give up paid work or reduce your working hours to make time to look after your grandchildren, or you may struggle to raise your grandchildren on a [pension](#).

Your own plans for [retirement](#) and your social life with friends can be turned upside down as your priorities shift to your grandchildren's education, development, and wellbeing, and you have to get to grips with the schools, technology and new trends in music and fashion.

You may struggle to help with homework because you're not familiar with [using a computer](#), or you can't [afford to buy one](#).

Local support if your grandchild lives with you

[Family Lives](#) gives help and support to [Kinship Carers](#) – grandparents and their family members who are bringing up a relative's child, often in very difficult circumstances.

[Family needs Fathers](#) provide information and support to fathers and grandfathers.

[Kinship](#) offer online and telephone advice to kinship carers, people caring for children in their family who aren't their parent.

Financial support available if your grandchild lives with you

If your grandchild is living with you on a permanent basis, you may be able to claim [Child Benefit](#) and Child Tax Credit to help you out financially. You can talk to someone about all of the benefits you may be entitled to at an [independent advice service](#).

[Kinship formerly Grandparents Plus](#) brings together grandparents who are raising their grandchildren to give them a voice, to share experiences, to find solutions and to tell government, children's services, the NHS, drug and alcohol agencies, and others what needs to change. They also hold events and produce a regular newsletter.

If your son or daughter has died

In the UK it is estimated that at least 250,000 children and young people are growing up after the death of their parents. For some of these children, both parents have died. In many of these cases, the children go to live with their grandparents. This can bring real emotional, practical and financial pressures.

[Winston's Wish](#) is a child bereavement charity which supports families when a parent or sibling has died. They offer a range of services, such as a residential group work for bereaved families, individual work with grieving children, and support for grandparents who are caring for bereaved grandchildren.

If your son or daughter has drug or alcohol-related problems

You may be looking after your grandchildren because their parents struggle with an [addiction](#) or are using [drugs and alcohol](#).

As a [Kinship Carer](#) there is support available.

Parental responsibility

The Children Act 1989 introduced the concept of 'parental responsibility', which is defined as 'all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which, by law, a parent has in relation to a child and his property'. This Act sets out how adults other than parents, such as grandparents, can obtain parental responsibility and how they can become guardians.

When professionals, such as teachers or health staff, are working with your grandchild they will usually want to know who has parental responsibility, as it is that person who can make decisions regarding your grandchild's welfare.

For more information, see:

- [Family Lives](#) website section on [Kinship care](#)
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If you are a step grandparent

When relationships within your family change, one of the hardest aspects to manage may be accepting children into your family who have other parents.

You may find that your son or daughter becomes involved with a new partner who has their own children, meaning that you become a step-grandparent. This can be really difficult. Hopefully, the following tips may help:

- **be welcoming** making new family is a difficult and stressful task. Everyone needs as much support and confidence-boosting as they can get.
- **be fair** this means that if you're giving presents, time or attention, you need to share it out equally. Ignoring a child who you see as 'not yours' hurts not only the child, but your son or daughter too, and can hurt the other children who are involved.
- **give the new members of your family a chance** you may find that you enjoy spending time with them too.
- **give yourself time** don't be too hard on yourself if you don't like them immediately.

If you are denied access to your grandchildren

Family breakdown can limit or prevent access between you and your grandchild (or grandchildren). It is estimated that over one million children are denied contact with their grandparents, often due to **divorce** or similar breakdown of family relationships.

Many grandparents lose contact with their grandchildren because they are not advised properly and because the legal system can be complicated and expensive.

The current law means that grandparents don't have an automatic right to apply for contact or residence of their grandchildren following divorce, separation or care proceedings. However, you do have the right to be made a party to the proceedings.

Families Need Fathers is a charity which works to keep children and all parents in contact after separation. It has many grandparents amongst its members and offers advice and support to anyone who needs help with these issues.

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Useful Organisations

Citizens Advice Newcastle (CAN)

Website: <http://citizensadvice-newcastle.org.uk>

Telephone: 0191 229 2750

Address: 4th Floor, City Library, NE1 8AX

Child Benefit Office

Website: <https://www.gov.uk/contact-child-benefit-office>

Telephone: 0191 229 2750

Address: Child Benefit Office, NE88 1AA

Family Mediation Council

Website: <http://www.familymediationcouncil.org.uk/>

Telephone: 01707 594 055

Families Need Fathers

Email: admin@fnf.org.uk

Website: www.fnf.org.uk

Telephone: 01707 594 055

Kinship – formerly Grandparents Plus

Email: info@kinship.org.uk

Website: www.kinship.org.uk

Telephone: 03300 167 235

Address: The Foundry , SE11 5RR

Newcastle Action for Parent and Toddler Groups Initiative (NAPI)

Email: admin@napi.org.uk

Website: www.napi.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 265 6158

Address: Heaton Community Centre, NE6 5DY

Winston's Wish

Email: info@winstonswish.org.uk

Website: www.winstonswish.org.uk

Telephone: 01242 515 157

Address: 3rd Floor Cheltenham House, GL50 3JR

Family Lives

Email: askus@familylives.org.uk

Website: www.familylives.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 284 4060

Address: Space Works, NE7 7LX

Grandparents Apart UK

Email: grandparentskk@btinternet.com

Website: www.grandparentsapart.co.uk

Telephone: 0141 882 5658

Grandparents As Parents (GAP)

Email: careandshare@hotmail.co.uk

Telephone: 0141 882 5658

Gransnet

Email: contactus@gransnet.com

Website: www.gransnet.com

Telephone: 0141 882 5658

Proud Grandparents

Website: www.proudgrandparents.co.uk

Telephone: 0141 882 5658

LaterLife

Email: laterlifeenquiries@laterlife.com

Website: <http://www.laterlife.com>

Telephone: 0141 882 5658

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