

# Grandmother Research

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**Nearly 1000 grandmothers responded to our survey, at least to have a look at it. Some had trouble with the online presentation (sorry, our fault not yours – the technology doesn't always behave) and many of you emailed us and received a hard copy of the survey to fill out. In all we ended up with about 600 fully completed surveys and 700 partially completed ones. It will take time for us to complete a full analysis of all this data. But in the meantime, here are some early findings.**

## **Grandmothers love what they do**

There is no doubt that grandmothers love what they do. We've been overwhelmed by the sense of joy that emanates from the survey comments and emails that we've received. What's so good about being a gran? Here are some of the things grandmothers said:

The best thing about being a grandmother is:

*enjoying the best aspects of mothering without the pitfalls*

*experiencing a new kind of love*

*everything!*

*feeling as though I am needed and loved*

*getting to know these new little people as they grow and develop*

*having fun with children and learning from them*

*insight into young minds*

*it's a joyous experience*

*just being with them*

*just to have a beautiful baby in my arms again*

*the enormous & unconditional love & trust between my grandchildren & me*

*the unconditional love you receive*

And that's just a selection! There were also many comments about how having grandchildren can bring you closer to a son or daughter, make you feel more strongly part of a family, give you a sense of purpose and of being needed, even heal family rifts. Watching young children grow and develop and watching your son or daughter develop as a parent are life enhancing experiences, as is being able to offer a special relationship to a grandchild. Many grandmothers commented how they were more patient and relaxed than when bringing up their own children – perhaps because they had more time, fewer worries and pressures, perhaps just more confidence. Some grandmothers said their grandchildren helped to keep them young, kept them up to date with what's happening in the world, and motivated them to keep interested.

### **Some of the problems**

Of course we also asked “what's the worst thing about being a grandma?” and that proved just as interesting. More than 10% couldn't think of anything they didn't like (except things like “*having to hand them back*”, or “*not enough time to spend with the children who are now at school*”). Another 10% regretted living too far away to see the grandchildren as often as they wanted to. Probably the most common complaint was couched in terms of ‘getting old’ – experiencing poor health or not always having enough energy to cope (e.g., “*the physical tiredness of caring for a robust, active 18 month old*”), getting tired after longer baby-sitting stints, perhaps just being “*expected to look after them too often*”. And of course everyone's pet hate, “*dirty nappies*”, featured strongly.

More seriously but less commonly, there were conflicts with the children's parents (“in-laws” being particular culprits here) about discipline, or expectations of the grandparenting role, and also occasionally conflicts with the other grandparents about some aspect of a grandchild's life. A few of our respondents found themselves in very difficult circumstances because divorce or family conflict was jeopardising their relationships with their grandchildren. Here are some of the worries and stresses that grandmothers faced:

### **Concerns about the grandchildren**

*anxiety for their safety*

*seeing them unhappy*

*being far away from them*

*being powerless to stop their suffering from the mother and her defacto.*

*child's naughtiness sometimes - perhaps more her frustrations*

*tantrums*

*worrying about their future in uncertain world*

### **Conflict with in-laws and other family members**

*at mercy of daughter -in-law*

*attitude of today's daughters-in-law to mothers-in-law; I loved my mother-in-law, AND I was respectful*

*being caught in the middle of 'arguments' between my grandchildren and their parents*

*competition with other grandparents*

*conflict with partner as he is a step parent*

*following my daughters discipline regime when it differs from my own experience*

*frustration in dealing with step daughter and dead beat husband*

*having to be very careful about expressing an different opinion regarding child-rearing*

*my sons in law!*

### **Resentment or concern at demands or expectations**

*babysitting demands sometimes too great*

*being expected to bail out our children financially, logistically & emotionally.*

*being expected to drop what I wanted to do at short notice to baby-sit.*

*conflict about what the expectations of babysitting are*

*tension between time spent with them and time we would like to spend on our own varied interests and activities*

### **Reflections on self, role or identity**

*being perceived by the world as 'only the grandmother'*

*not having enough time for myself*

*recognising how I could have been a better mother for my kids when they were younger*

*seeing the same mistakes I made with my children being repeated by my daughter*

*sadness that they are deprived of contact with their wonderful grandfather who predeceased them*

*wrinkles!*

### **Concerns about ability to cope or amount of work**

*becoming tired more easily than I used to*

*cleaning up after a visit of all three families & 6 grandchildren at the same time particularly if overnight*

*fatigue in school holidays when also working*

*feeling financially inadequate*

That's all for now. Your feedback is welcome (see Who We Are on the website). Keep checking the website for more grandmother study results. You might be interested, for example, in what grandmothers said was the best piece of advice they would give a new gran, or in some of our challenging findings about how grandmothers respond to their sons' children in comparison with their daughters' children. Stay in touch!