

NSLAP WELLNESS TIP: Grandparenting - How to best support your grandchildren

The following is an article excerpt from Homewood Human Solutions™, your health and wellness provider.

Grandparents play a vital role in today's society – from far or near, grandparents can provide continuity and stability in a child's life. Grandparents have the benefit of being able to interact on a level that is once removed from the day-to-day responsibilities of parents and for children, the grandparent/grandchild bond is like none other.

There is a major difference between parenting and grandparenting – and if you fail to appreciate the difference, conflict can ensue. If you are a grandparent, talk to your son or daughter and their spouse about what role they would like for you to have with their children. Let them know if, for example, you are not interested in babysitting, but would like to share other activities with each grandchild. When it comes to buying expensive gifts, discuss it first with the parents. Be sure to listen and maintain ongoing, open lines of communication. Let them learn from their mistakes, just as you did.

Share the things you love to do with your grandchildren. Whether it's baking, fishing, or playing cards, children will cherish those memories.

Encourage them to share their interests with you. The latest books they've read or their hobbies; go to movies, concerts, museums and other places that allow you to be together and exchange ideas and opinions.

Take a trip with them and involve them in the planning of it. Have them spend vacation time with you in order to create some special memories. At the end of your time together create a photo album for their ongoing memories.

Try to spend one-on-one time with each grandchild in order to give them personal attention in a relaxed atmosphere. This will help each grandchild truly blossom and be able to share their feelings, desires, and dreams.

Remember your grandchildren are being raised in a different world than the one in which you raised your children. If some discipline is required, try to be as laid back as possible. Be flexible about the rules of everyday living such as diet or bedtime.

Even if your grandchildren live far away, it is still possible to build a close relationship with them. When they are very young, you will need to involve their parents, but as they get older you can engage them directly by phone, internet, or mail. Stay in touch with grandchildren even as they grow into teenagers – be prepared to talk about some lively topics!

An important role for grandparents is that of family historian. Make it a point to tell your grandchildren stories about your childhood, as well as that of their parents, your parents, their aunts and uncles and other family members, so they can see how they fit into the family tree. Telling family stories helps foster a sense of connection and family tradition.

The bottom line

Everyone's idea of what the role of a good grandparent is will vary depending on personal goals and family traditions. You can be many things to your grandchildren – their friend, confidant, role model and more.

Being a good grandparent today requires all the wisdom, understanding, patience, and love you have acquired throughout your lifetime. Developing a loving relationship between two generations takes time,

interest, and concern. It is an opportunity to experience the world in a new way through younger eyes, play, 'fall in love' again and to appreciate the magic of the developing mind.

The unconditional love and support of a grandparent can offer much needed stability and serve as a healthy role model in the life of their grandchild.

Supporting grandparents parenting grandchildren

The challenges faced by grandparents who are raising their grandchildren can be daunting, but they are surmountable. Often grandparents become parents as the result of a divorce, death, incarceration, alcohol and drug use, physical abuse or abandonment. Should this be the case, the grandparents may not know where to turn, and may be in need of basic information as well as counselling, support and respite.

You can help out in practical ways by offering to take the kids or arranging play dates with your children, providing financial support, have the family over for holiday meals, summer BBQs or an evening of fun and games.

*For additional information, support, resources and counseling on grandparenting, visit the NSLAP website at www.nslap.ca. Please note that **NSLAP** is your "company" name when you register. When you call the NSLAP number at **1-866-299-1299**, (Français: 1-866-398-9505; TTY: 1-888-384-1152) Your call will be answered any time, day or night, 365 days per year.*