

"I have to take a 30 mile round trip into town to meet up with my daughter and pick up my grandson three days a week."

"I have to get up at 5.30 to get two buses to my son's house to childmind and the same again in the evening four days a week. It's very tiring and I'm not home until after 7.00pm."

"I do worry about him having an accident or injury on my watch, I probably am more worried about that with him than I was with my own children."

"It's good that it's just a few hours each week and you don't have to worry about everything as with your own children and can just enjoy their company at the time."

What would help?

Suggestions from grandparents included:

- A chance to chat with grandparents who have more experience.
- Knowing about our rights and money as grandparents and carers.
- Information about advantages and disadvantages of looking after grandchildren.
- A grandparents group for get togethers and to support each other.

Information and resources

Gransnet a social networking site for grandparents, with helpful advice and support on a range of issues. www.granset.com

Grandparents Plus the national charity working for grandparents and kinship carers where they play a vital role in families for the support and development of children. www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

Grandparents - Family Lives Advice and information for grandparents, including tips on supporting your grandchildren with childcare, health, and kinship care if your grandchildren come to live with you. www.familylives.org.uk/advice/your-family/grandparents

PACEY is the Professional Association for Children and Early years and has information and resources on your rights as a childminder. www.pacey.org.uk



FAMILIES SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Hints & Tips Grandparents' Top Tips for Childminding

Welcome to our Grandparents' Top Tips for Childminding. We put these tips together as part of our Families Supporting Families project.

We know all families work differently, and in many cases grandparents take on caring responsibilities or childminding duties for their grandchildren. We spoke to grandparents across Scotland to find out what works for them, what helps them to maintain their own health and wellbeing, and what advice they have for others.

We hope these tips will help you enjoy looking after your grandchildren, make things easier and find ways to support you and your family.

"It has been good to get to know my granddaughter better and to know that I'm helping my daughter and her husband too. It does keep you on your toes mentally and physically - that's got to be a good thing."

Starting out

If you are just beginning or thinking about looking after your grandchildren then this can be a good time to think about what you need and how things may work.

- Set your ground rules at the beginning and be clear about what you are prepared to do and how much time that will take.
- Discuss with your partner before you start to make sure they are on board.
- Have a trial run before it becomes a necessity if possible.
- Ensure that there are alternative childcare options so you can take breaks or if you are unwell.
- Follow the rules the parent has set down about what foods can be eaten, limits on screen time or bedtimes and other routines.
- Think about the effects on other members of the family or any pets you have.
- Be prepared to say no if you feel what is being asked will be too much.

"We agreed at the beginning, about how much time we will childmind and things around routines, nappies and food. This will change over time but I stick to my daughter's rules and I don't try out new foods or anything as there is a history of allergies."

outside the box

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“My partner and I talked about looking after the grandchildren and what it would mean for me and for us. It has an impact on what we can do so important we are both happy with it.”

Your health and wellbeing

Our health and wellbeing is very important and looking after our grandchildren can be something that helps us stay active and busy. We also know that looking after children, and especially babies and young children, is hard work that is both physically and emotionally demanding at times. There are a few things we can do to support our health and wellbeing.

- Look after yourself - to look after others we need to be looking after ourselves first. Plan and make meals that you enjoy and take time for the things you enjoy doing.
- Don't forget to include time to do the things you like, meeting up with friends or doing your own activities.
- Slow down and enjoy your time with the children.
- Take your grandchild along to things where possible, don't cut yourself off from friends.
- Don't underestimate how tiring it might be so make sure you can take breaks in the week or during the day.
- Don't be afraid to say you are unwell or too tired.

“It can be quite tiring and I'm struggling with my bad knee to play on the floor with her for very long. I don't know if this will get harder as she gets older. I encourage her to play at the table so I can sit on a chair.”

“Over time I have learnt to just enjoy my time with the children and try not worry too much about things - it helps me feel better.”

“I think, my husband and I are out and about more when looking after our grandson and it has forced us to take more time to enjoy the simple things and local nature. We only childmind two days a week so we have plenty time for other things.”

Finances

There are extra costs associated with looking after children, whether its juice and cake when you're out about, or extra nappies, a soft play visit on a rainy day, or toys and equipment to keep in your home. Thinking about how these expenses impact on our finances is important, along with talking about who pays for what things.

- Often it's hard to discuss this with family but it can easily become a sore point.
- Think about any impact on your finances before starting, what extra costs might there be?
- Be clear about what you will pay for and what not, and make sure you are reimbursed for agreed expenses.
- Will you have to buy food or nappies etc., and what about any travel costs getting to and from child's home or to any activities?
- Find out about any financial help for example with national insurance or tax credits.

“I love looking after my grandchildren, but it can be costly times and I need to be careful with money.”

“We are both retired and have good pensions so we are happy to pay for more things. When our children were little we didn't have much so it's lovely to be able to treat everyone.”

“I'm a widow and I'm finding that my pension is not what I expected it to be so I'm looking for another part-time job and my son knows this will mean I can't look after my grandchild for so many days.”

School holidays

Many grandparents help out with childcare during school holidays. For some it's a few days here and there or for a week or so, and often when this is the case, looking after grandchildren can feel like more of a holiday or a treat. But for some grandparents it's more of a longer term commitment and needs some thinking and planning.

- Before the holidays agree with family about the number of hours or days you want to do.
- Think about the costs of activities, travel, food and treats - it all mounts up and the older the children the more it costs.
- Make use of holiday clubs and activity programmes.
- Plan things in advance for bad weather and rainy days.
- Take time for yourself and the things you enjoy.
- Include the children in household activities - such as washing up, hoovering, and shopping.

“I like the summer holidays, we can take it easy and not rush about and the children spend a lot of time playing in the garden. Rainy days are harder work though!”

“We have our two grandchildren to stay for a week each summer. I really look forward to it and plan treats and activities. As they have got older they want to do less but the things they want to do are more expensive!”

The positive things

Grandparents talked about what were the best things about looking after their grandchildren and they had a lot to say.

“I'm more physically active and I feel better about things.”

“It keeps me in touch and connected with my family.”

“I get to be a part of my grandchildren's lives.”

“It's very satisfying to be able to help my family.”

“It has allowed us to take things more slowly and enjoy the simple things - like going for a walk in the park.”

“I was looked after by my grandmother and my mother looked after my children, so it was totally natural that I would do the same.”

Some Challenges

Many of the challenges grandparents talked about were around traveling to look after their grandchildren, the pick-up and collection times and worry around accidents and injuries.

“My partner complains if my son does not turn up on time to pick up the grandson and this upsets me. It's never that long and considering he worked away a lot himself it's a bit rich!”