



# Senior Series

*The Ohio  
Department of  
Aging*



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## What About Grandfathers?

From a 10 year-old boy:

*"My friend has a grandfather who plays with him and shows him a lot of stuff. My grandfather lives far away. How can I get a grandfather? I want one."*

(Kornhaber, 1996; pg. 7)

Did you know that 95% of all people over age 65 who have adult children also have grandchildren? That's about 60 million Americans! Did you know that the average age at which Americans become grandparents is 45 and that a majority of men expect to become grandfathers at age 52? That means men today can expect to spend the majority of their adult years in this very important role.

Researchers have found that grandchildren who have a close relationship with a grandfather are likely to perform well in school, display positive emotional adjustment, have higher self-esteem, and a greater ability to develop and maintain friendships. Grandfathers who report having close relationships

with grandchildren describe the significant joy they experience as a result of the unconditional love they feel for their grandchildren. Spending time with their grandchildren and displaying photographs of them provides reminders of their connection to future generations.

### Grandfather Contributions

Even though the grandfather role and the grandfather-grandchild relationship changes over time, researchers have consistently revealed how grandparents, grandfathers included, provide a variety of unique contributions and benefits to their grandchildren's lives.

### Sounding Board

Grandfathers have lots of wisdom and life experience to draw from—they have seen events and changes come and go. Even their mistakes can have a positive purpose. Because grandfathers are one step removed from direct disci-

plinary and parenting responsibilities, grandchildren tend to be more relaxed, more open to sharing, and may ask more thoughtful questions of their grandfathers. As grandchildren grow, they make attempts to learn about their world—their family, relationships, and society. A grandfather's perspective, formed from years of experience, can help guide, inform, and influence the growth and development of his grandchildren.

### ***Value Development***

Grandfathers can have a powerful influence on their grandchildren by teaching about perseverance, loyalty, hard work, patience, and sacrifice from their many life stories. Grandfathers have lived through wars, hard times, cultural changes, and technological revolutions and may tell their stories in a lively, engaging way that allows the story do the teaching. For those grandfathers who may not feel they have much to tell from their own life experiences, sharing simple stories about how they grew up and lessons they learned in life can help grandchildren to recognize and appreciate the generations who have gone before them, as well as develop new values. While stories may cause grandchildren to think about personal values, a grandfather's actions are important too. Grandchildren are observers, and they can learn powerful, lasting lessons from watching a grandfather go through life with a sense of humor, dignity, and generosity.

### ***Strong Sense of Family***

Grandfathers are living links between the generations; they help grandchildren become acquainted with extended family members, either in person or through photographs and stories. In today's world, schooling and jobs frequently separate families geographically, leading many grandchildren to lose their sense of connection to a common family support network. Grandchildren frequently want to know and learn about their family heritage, to have a sense of connection to the past, and to understand their unique place in their family's history. Grandfathers can help bring their grandchildren and extended family together so that the younger generations have opportunities to see and hear how different ages relate positively to one another.

### **Connecting With Grandchildren**

Grandfathers have a vitally important role to play, and today's grandfathers are stepping up to the plate and fulfilling it. Connecting with grandchildren is the first step to achieving a satisfying grandfather-grandchild relationship. Ideas for connecting to grandchildren include:

- Call or e-mail your grandchildren today just to say hello.
- Learn more about computers and the Internet together with your grandchildren.
- Get out the photo albums and share stories of your past.

- Visit the library with your grandchildren and do some genealogical research.
- Show respect for your grandchildren's parents. Avoid offering unsolicited advice.
- If you don't have any grandchildren of your own, or would like to have more interaction with younger generations, adopt a grandchild in your community. Become a volunteer in your place of worship or at a local school.
- Spend one-on-one time with a grandchild, teaching him or her a skill you have (i.e., woodworking, music, fishing, painting, etc.).

## Sources

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