

# Grandparenting



Grandparents play an extremely important role in the lives of children! Whether you are a grandparent who visits, or has custody you can help children build strong brain architecture, learn how to make good decisions, develop healthy relationships and learn new skills.



Promoting brain development doesn't require 'classes' or expensive toys. The architecture of the developing brain is built by positive interactions between young children and the people who look after them! As a grandparent, you may have more time to devote to playing with your grandchild.

It may be many years since you parented your own children. The things that you gave your own children are still important for your grandchildren: a warm loving relationship; a safe secure home; chances to try new things; daily routines; and gentle loving guidance. All these things will help your grandchildren grow into happy, healthy adults.

Below is a short list of new things that you may need to know as a grandparent:

- a. **Sleep-** Under 1 year of age, all babies should sleep on their back to decrease the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Children don't need to "cry it out" to learn how to sleep. Many new Moms report that having the support of their parents as they struggle through the sleeplessness of the early years is a big help.
- b. **Eating-** babies do not need solid foods till about 6 months of age. Children need us to model good eating habits for a lifetime. It is the adult's job to make healthy food available, it is the child's job to decide how much and what they will eat. No one should ever force a child to eat.
- c. **Car Seats-** Infants must ride in an approved car seat until they are 40 pounds. Which seat fits depends on the child's age and size. Contact your local Health Unit or Fire Department for more information.





## Play is the primary way that children build strong brains, learn to regulate their behaviors and emotions and build relationships with those around them.

Staying in touch with your grandchildren doesn't have to be difficult.

Use this as an opportunity to learn about technology that can connect you.

Skype or Facetime lets children see and hear you as you read or sing to them.

- d. **Allergies-** Almost all foods can be introduced starting at 6 months and offered frequently throughout the first year. For example, eggs do not have to be delayed until after 1 year of age. Honey must not be given before 12 months though. If you are unsure about how to handle food allergies for your grandchild, consult your public health nurse, family doctor or a pediatric dietician.
- e. **Distance-** In the past, children lived in the same communities with their grandparents and extended families. Now-a-days, adult children and grandchildren can live hours or days away. One grandma Skypes with her new granddaughter every week at bath time and both of them have fun getting to know each other. Texts, emails and letters can keep you connected. It may take a bit of time to learn this new way of connecting but your grandchildren will appreciate it.
- f. **Research on Brain development** - Children's brains grow most rapidly in the first three years of life and continue to grow more slowly till early adulthood. Children are not sponges to soak up those things that happen around them. Instead we know that children learn best through their everyday experiences, with people they love and trust, when the learning is fun and when they get to do things over and over until they are good at them.



Ever heard that phrase- "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger"? Brain research has shown us in the last 15 years that stress and 'bad things' don't make children strong! Repeated exposure to a lot of stress and/or violence will change the brains of children and can result in chronic illness in later life. One caring stable adult can make a difference; that could be you! Whether you are with your grandchild regularly or visit on Skype, your caring, consistent presence in their life can help them to manage stress and grow up to be healthy adults.



## Technology by itself is not bad. It is the types of things that are on the screen and their ability to ‘steal’ time from more productive and interactive play that is the issue.

1. I want to help raise kind, responsible, caring grandchildren is that even possible in today’s society?

Many of us worry about our children and grandchildren in today’s world. Do not believe everything you hear!

Research tells us that the things kids need most are the same now as 50 years ago; caring responsible adults who play with, look after and set rules and expectations for children. You cannot spoil an infant or child by looking after their needs and wants. Picking up a crying baby, toddler or hurt preschooler tells them that they are important and that you will care for them. Setting rules for behavior at the table lets children know what to expect and makes it clear what their job is! Children do not need to be spanked to learn how to behave. Spanking tells them that if you are bigger you can hit.



2. I am not comfortable with all of the technology that my grandchild is using, what do I need to know?

Limit screens and technology whenever you can, especially at the table and before/during bedtime. If no one is watching, turn off the TV or computer. Take the time to learn what your grandchild is playing or watching. Discuss real vs pretend; could you actually ride on a dolphin or have a panther as your best friend?

**“The greatest invention in the world is the mind of a child!”** Albert Einstein

Technology can enhance learning if adults join in and make it a shared experience. It can help children explore things that would not otherwise be available to them, like the rain forest. It can also be used to connect with grandchildren who live far away.

One caring consistent person in a child’s life can make a difference in the child’s ability to manage the stresses in their lives.

As a grandparent you can be that person! (or part of that team!)



**As a grandparent, it's OK to ask for help, from friends or family, from health experts or community members, we all want to support your efforts to raise happy healthy grandchildren.**

3. What kinds of things can I do with my grandchildren?

Many of the activities and community events that are available to parents are open to grandparents; a few that we thought you might like to look into are, swimming for fun or lessons, library trips and programs, local community program guides have toddler and preschool programs, the Fieldhouse and Rec Center, Dads Central (for

Grandpa only), Grandparents Fun Day at the local Library, Grandparents Support Group, Parent Link and seasonal or special events. If you are not sure whether a program or event is grandparent friendly just ask, you may be surprised.



4. How can I strengthen communication with my adult child as I grandparent?

Grandchildren change many things in our lives, including family dynamics. Caring for your grandchild can build strong bonds. It can also cause conflicts with your adult child. If you are finding your conversations with your adult child are getting tense or difficult, ask for help! Keeping your adult relationships warm and respectful helps you develop an even closer bond with your grandchild. A word of caution about text or email communication; it is difficult to “read between the lines” of these types of communication, sometimes the message can get lost, use these to set up face to face communications rather than to solve problems.

Visit The Foothills Children’s Wellness Network [www.foothillsnetwork.ca](http://www.foothillsnetwork.ca) to learn more about member agencies that can provide support and ideas, activities for young children, tips for grandparents on stages of development and positive discipline plus much more. Alternatively you can call the Network Navigator at 403-995-2706 to get more information.

Maintaining the relationship with your adult child while building one with your grandchild is a work in progress.

Take the time to get it right.