

Love those Grandkids!!

By Barbara Ashcroft

"Few things are more delightful than grandchildren fighting over your lap."

Doug Larson

What a great time of life! Finally get to play again, dress up, get down on the floor for games (on my good days), giggle, tell knock knock jokes, take in a Disney movie and then send them home! Can't get much better than this. Grandkids light up your life. They bring out the kid in you, think you're cool, love you unconditionally, and don't mind listening to your stories over and over again. They brighten your day when you're feeling down. They even "cheer" when you drop in. They make great welcoming committees.

According to the Vanier Institute of the Family, older Canadians (76% of those 65 and older) have grandchildren, and most have more than one. Today's grandparents live longer and experience a longer duration of grandparenthood than ever before. Many grandparents live into their grandchildren's adulthood. Grandparenting is another opportunity for us to connect, build relationships and make a difference in the lives of others.

Grandparents can be a wonderful influence in the lives of their grandchildren. We may provide additional adult role models for them, act as resources for information, give practical advice based on true life experiences, provide them with a sense of family history and continuity and become their confidants. We can also tell them some pretty hilarious historical tales about their own parents which they love to hear.

A grandparent may be a great emotional support to a grandchild. With our lives now hopefully less hurried, we are able to offer quality listening time to the growing child, and provide ongoing encouragement and assistance with their schoolwork, their social issues and their insecurities. Grandparents make great cheerleaders. They can foster the child's positive qualities, and show a little more patience with them, since they don't have to spend their whole day with them. Even grandparents who do not live in close proximity to their grandchildren may keep up a close relationship through a continual communication exchange. It's the constant interest and support shown that counts. If we establish positive relationships with our grandchildren in their early years, and keep the open communication going, this bond may continue

into the teenage years when a third party ear and respected voice may be very helpful as the adolescents begin to assert their independence. These same teenagers can also keep us up to date with new trends and changing cultural ways.

Becoming a grandparent involves a great deal of personal growth. Grandparents can sometimes get themselves into trouble with the parents. There really is no manual for grandparenting. When your first grandchild is born, you just want to get your hands on that beautiful baby. You forget that this little one is not yours. This can be especially difficult for grandmothers. One really never stops being a mother. It can be quite a confusing time trying to figure out your new role. New mothers need support, but may be very sensitive to any suggestions that grandmothers make as they may perceive the suggestions as criticism. Parenting practices and styles, as well, change over the years and the generations may view child rearing quite differently. Most grandparents want to help, but often may be confused as to how to do this without potential conflict. The Vanier Institute notes that "the grandparent role is characterized by complexity. In a sense it is more complex than being a parent because it involves more people (adult children and children-in-law, as well as another set of grandparents)." It appears that there really is no clear description for the role of a grandparent and that most "individuals negotiate roles within a wide range of possibilities." (J. Rosenthal & J. Gladstone, 2000)

The best role for grandparents to play is one of support, both for their adult children who are now parents and also for the new grandchildren. It takes time to adjust to the new role and to work out how that support can best be provided to meet the needs of everyone. Let the parents know you are there and then wait to be asked. Some grandparents today may find themselves in a primary caretaking role for their grandchildren. Most grandparents, however, don't seek out this role, but agree to provide this level of support out of some financial difficulties being experienced by the parents.

Grandparents can be an inspiration to their grandchildren. When my own grandmother was on her deathbed, I remember telling her that I wanted to be just like her some day. She had a very independent spirit, great drive, and always found a way to overcome life's hurdles. Her photo is a constant

daily reminder to me of that strength and attitude that I so often have to call on. My own children valued the time they spent with their grandparents. They often speak about Grandpa's laugh, his gentle spirit and his woodworking toy projects. My son became very close to my Mom when she was in her wheelchair for nine years, as he lifted and toted her around in his car. My daughter use to keep her paternal grandmother company on many occasions when she was alone. It is this contact with older grandparents that also provides the younger generation with a sense of respect for the aging process.

Grandchildren give us a sense of immortality as we think of our personal and family line being continued through them. This is a comforting thought as we begin to think about what legacy we will leave to the world. In the meantime, grab as many hugs and cuddles as you can get and don't miss this great opportunity to get silly, play like a kid again, go to the park, eat ice cream, swing on the swings and then send them home to their parents! Enjoy a soothing cup of tea, in your own peaceful and quiet space, smile and be thankful for the wonderful gift of your grandkids.

Grandparenting Websites

AARP Grandparent page: www.aarp.org/families/grandparents/

Grandloving: www.grandloving.com

Grandparent Foundation: www.grandparenting.org

Cangrands: www.cangrands.com

