

The Grand Plan: Planning Tips for Sharing Child Care Between Generations



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Many parents of children aged five and under turn to grandparents for help with child care. While grandparents are often happy to help—our national survey of grandparents providing child care showed that 94% enjoyed this caregiving role—talking about expectations from the get-go can help ensure this arrangement goes smoothly. Here are some tips on what to talk through before sharing the care.

What schedule works for both parent and grandparent? Whose home, what hours?

Setting a schedule that grandparents feel comfortable with is important because caring for small children is hard work. Finding a schedule that feels right for parents and grandparents means better care for grandchildren.

When it comes to the day-to-day, parents can help by communicating when they're running late (and being timely on days when grandparents can't be flexible because they have other plans).

What's our starting point on issues like sleep, mealtimes, disciplines, and screens?

71% of grandparents told us their own parenting experience gives them confidence in caring for their grandchildren. But some child care advice has changed in the last few decades (think car seats) and everybody has their own parenting style. Using our [Grandparent Guide](#) as a resource, parents and grandparents should talk through



expectations about:

- Nap and sleep schedules (including safe sleep practices)
- Mealtimes—what and how much babies and toddlers will be fed; and other rules around mealtime (for example, the “clean your plate” approach is no longer recommended)
- Limit-setting and discipline approaches
- Screen time guidelines
- Other child-rearing practices

Will grandparents be paid for their caregiving?

Talking about finances is hard! We get it. And the truth is that few grandparents are paid for providing child care, only about 22% based on our grandparent survey. Most grandparents describe caring for grandkids as rewarding in other ways: getting to spend time together on a regular basis (89%), getting to influence early life experiences (76%), and ensuring the best care (74%). But have the talk anyway. It’s especially important if grandparents are struggling financially.

How will we handle disagreements?

First off, disagreements are very normal! In our survey, nearly 1 out of 2 grandparents tell us that they don’t always agree with their grandchild’s parents over issues like managing behavior, sleep, and mealtimes.

If disagreements arise, it’s helpful to remember that you’re in this together, united by love for your little one.

Keep in mind that not all rules are equally important. Be clear about which rules are “carved in stone” and which are more flexible. It may be that sticking closely to a nap schedule is a parent’s unbreakable rule, but they can be more flexible about the occasional cookie. For guidance on talking through disagreements, use our [If You Only Knew](#) resource.



How will we communicate about care?

It's very helpful for parents to know how the day went for their babies and toddlers—especially how they ate, slept, and, well, pooped. Likewise, it's helpful for grandparents to know how well a child slept the night before or what he ate before arriving at grandma's house. (A tired, hungry child is a cranky child.)

What happens in an emergency (and what do we consider an emergency)?

Talk together about what symptoms should signal a call/text to parents, which symptoms mean a call to the doctor, and when grandparents should immediately call 911. Health care providers can be a huge help with this issue, and often have resources that discuss “when to worry” about child illnesses.



How will we bring up challenges and make changes to the agreement?

It's easiest if you plan to revisit your agreement regularly—even on a monthly basis at first. Start with your own feelings—“I love when you...” or “I’m worried about...”—and go from there. Or ask what you can do to make things easier for your caregiving partner (either parent or grandparent).

Most importantly, **remember to express your gratitude.** For parents, you might share the ways this arrangement has made your life easier. For grandparents, you might tell your adult child how caring for your grandchild has made your life richer.

Where can we go for parenting information? Parents tell us the amount of parenting information on the Web is overwhelming. It's good to find a reliable source—like [zerotothree.org](https://www.zerotothree.org) or [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)—that both parents and grandparents can use when child-rearing questions come up.

Check out more resources for grandparents at [zerotothree.org/grandparents](https://www.zerotothree.org/grandparents).