

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Grandparenting in the 21st Century **(Childcare: Topic of the Month)**

"Grandparents are more necessary today than they have been in the last 100 years.

*Young people have to have a sense of foundation
and grandparents can provide the roots."*

Dr. Maya Angelou is among the many who see the essential role grandparents will need to play in the 21st century. Kathryn and Allan Zullo, authors of *The Nanas And The Papas: A Boomers' Guide to Grandparenting* chronicles the first wave of the 76-million-strong baby boom generation who are becoming grandparents. Yet, who are these boomer grandpas and grandmas? We all know by now that many of us boomers do not fit the stereotypical grandparent — retired, gray-haired folks sitting in rockers and baking cookies.

Some of us may be grey-haired, but The Zullos report that us “baby-boomer grandparents are younger-thinking, healthier, wealthier, and better educated than our grandparents were. We are more active and less formal than our own parents were at our age. We no longer fit the traditional yet unrealistic image of our elderly kin, who lived in a different period.” According to experts, boomer grandparents will reinvent grandparenting as a second chance at righting whatever wrongs we made as

parents—along with taking a proactive role in helping and advising our adult children. That is, if their children want it. For Gen X parents, that may not be the case. But for Millennials just becoming parents in their early twenties, they are showing evidence of seeking sage advice from boomer Mom and Dad. And they just might act on it. Gen X may be willing to listen but usually decides something independent of their elder's advice.

One of the biggest challenges facing boomer grandparents today is that, unlike previous generations, many are helping to raise their grandkids because of economic pressures and personal problems of their adult children. Other accompanying challenges include living far from the grandparents as well as coping with divorce. This makes it much more difficult for boomers to play a meaningful part in their grandchildren's lives.

Today blended families are also often times broken, distraught, and strapped. Their adult children may also be “drugged out, wiped out, or stressed out” showing up on their parents' doorsteps asking, or more like telling, the grandparents “Here they are, take care of my kids.” Zullo also report that “there is another major challenge facing today's boomer grandparents: for the first time in history, a generation of grandparents will be caring for their parents. We boomers must find ways to handle our lives and careers and relationships while providing help for our elderly parents as well as for our adult children and grandchildren.”

Does this sound familiar to you or are you one of the very lucky ones whose children and grandchildren are doing just fine? I hope the latter for you all. No matter which scenario fits, it is so important to be able to give your grandchildren the love and

time they need from you. Experts and other sage grandparents advise us to try to be more of a playmate, a friend, a teacher, and a family historian. Grandparents are not only vital to the well-being of the family but also to the well-being of the country.

We are encouraged whether we are a forties grandparent or a 75-year-old grandpa, “. . .some things never change—like the incredible joy and unconditional love grandparents and grandchildren share. The Zullos and the Grandparent Foundation offer these truths and tips for you expectant and veteran grandparents while traveling through a never to be forgotten adventure:

- Make sure you're on the same page as your adult children when it comes to parenting. Child-rearing has changed so much since we raised our kids. There are new rules about what to do and not to do. There's so much to learn — and unlearn. Don't put the baby on her tummy for a nap, Nana; put her on her back. Toss out the baby aspirin, Papa; use children's ibuprofen instead. No, Grammy, don't give the baby any juice; it's not good for her at this age. Expectant grandparents need to read what the parents-to-be are reading about child-rearing. Also, the grandparents and parents should discuss with each other their expectations and roles to avoid conflict and promote understanding: Do you expect us to baby-sit every weekend? Do you need financial help? Can I offer suggestions and advice or should I wait until you ask me? It's vital that everyone communicates before the baby arrives.
- Be involved with your grandparenting programs. There are a number of national and international programs that need your involvement, such as "Grandparent Network," hospital programs for "Expectant" Grandparents," "Grandparent Days

in Schools," and the "Grandparent Connection Program" - involving volunteer grandparents with children in day-care centers, religious institutions, nursing homes, mentor programs, etc. Many of these programs have been nationally and internationally replicated. Even if you don't have grandchildren, you can still see yourself in a "grandparenting" role as an elder for your community in any number of these programs.

- Grandchildren learn things from their grandparents they learn nowhere else. Contact with a beloved elder enhances a child's emotional, physical and spiritual health.
- The grandparent-grandchild bond is a separate and unique human relationship, second only in emotional importance to the parent-child bond.
- Grandparents and grandchildren have a complex relationship that comprises the biological, psychological, intellectual, social and spiritual "dimensions" of human experience.
- The grandparent-grandchild relationship is an "illuminating" relationship that is a repository of the purest form of human love- unconditional love- non-judgmental love, freely given simply because the person exists.
- The grandparent function is built on basic truths that may be expressed differently in different societies.
- The role of grandparents is a template for elders to live a meaningful and useful life. Some roles are: living ancestor, family historian, nurturer, mentor, spiritual guide, wizard, crony and role model for the child's future grandparenthood and perception of aging.

- The grandparenting role shifts and changes during the life cycle and responds to differing needs of the growing child.
- Enacting the role of grandparents helps to maintain the mental and physical health, of aging individuals, as well as fostering a positive identity, and a sense of usefulness, empowerment and meaning to later life.
- Many of the functions of biological grandparents can be carried out by non-biological grandparents.

Resources:

AARP, http://www.aarp.org/families/grandparents/family_relationships/a2004-01-16-grandparentsrole.html

Book—*A Boomer's Guide to Grandparenting* by Allan Zullo (Author), Kathryn Zullo. 2004.

Book—*Extreme Grandparenting* by Tim Kimmel and Darcy Kimmel. 2007.

Book—*The Nanas And The Papas: A Boomers' Guide to Grandparenting* by Kathryn and Allan Zullo. 1999.

The Grandparent Foundation, <http://www.grandparenting.org/>

Video—*Grandparenting: Enriching Lives*. Civitas. 2002.

Book—*The Grandparent Solution: How Parents Can Build a Family Team for Practical, Emotional, and Financial Success* by Arthur Kornhabe. 2004.

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Life's Laughs For Kids, Parents, & Grandparents **(Childcare: Topic of the Month)**

This week I planned to cover tips on long distance grandparenting but couldn't pass up the following offered by The Foundation for Grandparenting, www.grandparenting.org. So, enjoy a chuckle or two with those born between 1930 and 1979!

***TO ALL THE KIDS WHO SURVIVED
the 1930's 40's, 50's, 60's and 70's !!***

First, we survived being born to mothers who smoked and/or drank while they were pregnant.

They took aspirin, ate blue cheese dressing, tuna from a can, and didn't get tested for diabetes.

Then after that trauma, we were put to sleep on our tummies in baby cribs covered with bright colored lead-based paints.

We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors or cabinets and when we rode our bikes, we had no helmets, not to mention, the risks we took hitchhiking.

As infants & children, we would ride in cars with no car seats, booster seats, seat belts or air bags. Riding in the back of a pick up on a warm day was always a special treat.

We drank water from the garden hose and NOT from a bottle. We shared one soft drink with four friends, from one bottle and NO ONE actually died from this.

We ate cupcakes, white bread and real butter and drank koolade made with sugar, but we weren't overweight because . . .

WE WERE ALWAYS OUTSIDE PLAYING!

We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back when the streetlights came on.

No one was able to reach us all day.

And we were O.K.

We would spend hours building our go-carts out of scraps and then ride down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes. After running into the bushes a few times, we learned to solve the problem.

We did not have Playstations, Nintendo's, X-boxes, no video games at all, no 150 channels on cable, no video movies or DVD's, no surround-sound, CD's or Ipods, no cell phones!, no personal computers , no Internet or chat rooms....

WE HAD FRIENDS and we went outside and found them!

We fell out of trees, got cut, broke bones and teeth and there were no lawsuits from these accidents.

We ate worms and mud pies made from dirt, and the worms did not live in us forever.

We were given BB guns for our 10th birthdays, made up games with sticks and tennis balls and, although we were told it would happen, we did not put out very many eyes.

We rode bikes or walked to a friend's house and knocked on the door or rang the bell, or just walked in and talked to them!

Little League had tryouts and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't had to learn to deal with disappointment. Imagine that!!

The idea of a parent bailing us out if we broke the law was unheard of.

THEY ACTUALLY SIDED WITH THE LAW!

These generations have produced some of the best risk-takers, problem solvers and inventors ever!

The past 50 years have been an explosion of innovation and new ideas.

We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility, and we learned

HOW TO DEAL WITH IT ALL!

If YOU are one of them . . . CONGRATULATIONS!

You might want to share this with others who have had the luck to grow up as kids, before the lawyers and the government regulated so much of our lives for our own good. And while you are at it, forward it to your kids so they will know how brave (and lucky) their parents were.

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Long Distance Grandparenting in the 21st Century **(Childcare: Topic of the Month)**

"A 6 year old was asked where his grandma lived. "oh," he said, "she lives at the airport, and when we want her we just go get her. then when we're done having her visit, we take her back to the airport."

It is something we can't deny. Most of our children and grandchildren live all over the nation. If you are one who has your family down the street, treasure every moment. It is very unusual in the 21st century. Although there are not too many stats out there to measure this, all we have to do is look around us to know it is true—at work and in our neighborhood.

Living long distances from our grandbabies make day-to-day grandparenting almost impossible. The *Foundation for Grandparenting* (www.grandparenting.org) poses these questions:

How many of your friends, colleagues or neighbors live in families with three generations present?

How many grandparents in your locale live near their children and grandchildren?

How many parents have their own parents nearby?

Why do we move so much? There are a variety of reasons—based on need, job, health, personal choice, retirement, a new life adventure. Whatever the reasons, it

definitely makes it hard to sustain close relationships and foster a grandparent-grandchild relationship.

The Foundation gets thousands of calls asking for help in long distance grandparenting. “Many long-distance grandparents want to know if the axiom ‘out of sight, out of mind’ holds true. They ask, ‘does living a long-distance away from a grandchild inevitably relegate me to play only a token role in my grandchild’s life?’ A grandfather wanted answers, ‘When such situations are unavoidable is there is anything I can do to countermand the results of not having frequent contact with my grandchildren? Do we have to be strangers? How do I minimize the negative effects of distance? I don’t want to become obsolete as a grandfather.’ This is a serious issue with no easy answers.”

There are a number of negative effects from living far from each other. Yet, we need to first understand the emotional and spiritual "Vital Connection" between grandparents and grandchildren. First, “time alone in a one-to-one situation. Undivided attention between grandparents and grandchildren is difficult to achieve when grandparents and grandchildren live a long distance from one another.” Then, there is the loss of day to day contact. We all know we need to be part of their daily lives in order for the bond to grow, especially in the early years.

The Foundation does offer us some comforting perspective. First, time typically moves more slowly for young children and the time you spend alone with your grandchild is savored by the child, and is remembered for a very long time. Second, you have the great advantage in the 21st century of technology via the internet, email, phone calls, faxes, text messaging, picture forwarding, videoconferencing in real

time/face-to-face, shared computer games, your own family home page! Then there is video and audio taping. You can send loving and fun notes back and forth that keeps your contact filled with love, adoring interest that is lively and relevant. And, of course, document special events in their lives. Be there when your grandchild is born and at important events like graduations, confirmations, recitals, holidays—whatever events your family highly values. All these tech options will definitely foster emotional relations over distance. Although we all know being physically together is the preferred, technology can boost ongoing communication and make all the difference.

Here are some of the Foundation's additional long distance tips for us grandparents to ease the emotions and sadness that periodically show up:

- Primary principle = maintain continuity and communication
- Convene a family conference with children and grandchildren.
- Identify the issues and discuss the pitfalls and problems of being geographically apart.
- Pledge to minimize the damage to the fabric of the family by keeping in constant communication and being physically together as much as possible. The kids will love to hear this.
- Devise a step-by-step action plan to be together as much as possible. Kids will love this too.
- Pledge family financial resources to support the plan. Allocate resources to specific activities. (Ex. Pay Grandma's airfare to visit while Mom and Dad go on vacation. Grandparents save all year and pay for themselves

and their grandchildren to attend our Grandparent-Grandchild Summer Camp.)

- Allow for as much grandparent-grandchild "alone" time as possible and coordinate this with visits, parent vacations, etc. Plan "alone" outings when together.

Start being creative in all kinds of ways to keep the connection growing. Use spontaneous contact whenever possible on a weekly basis if at all possible. For you older grandmas and grandpas, don't let the word, **technology, technology, technology**, throw you off. Take classes to learn how to get with the 21st century where your grandkids are already savvy. You will never regret it, and your grandchildren will know how important their lives are to you.

Just think about it! That precious grandchild will grow up so fast. They will soon be old enough to travel to see you, even to spend the summer! And they will want to! You never can tell, they just may say, "When I get older I am going to go to college in the city where Grandma lives so I can see her all the time." That's my dream.

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What is a Grandparent Anyway?—straight from a child's heart

(Childcare: Topic of the Month)

Did you know what children call their "overly critical" grandmother? Hint: what starts with "Gr" and ends with "ator?" Close your eyes and try to guess. Don't cheat!!

Ok, here it is:

"The Gramminator"

How does your grandchild describe you? Here are some sweet and sassy definitions from a class of eight year olds (www.grandparenting.org):

WHAT IS A GRANDPARENT?

Grandparents are a lady and a man who have no little children of her own. They like other people's.

A grandfather is a man grandmother.

Grandparents don't have to do anything except be there when we come to see them. They are so old they shouldn't play hard or run. It is good if they drive us to the store and have lots of quarters for us.

When they take us for walks, they slow down past things like pretty leaves and caterpillars.

They show us and talk to us about the color of the flowers and also why we shouldn't step on "cracks."

They don't say, "Hurry up."

Usually grandmothers are fat, but not too fat to tie your shoes.

They wear glasses and funny underwear.

They can take their teeth and gums out.

Grandparents don't have to be smart.

They have to answer questions like "why isn't God married?" and "How come dogs chase cats?"

When they read to us, they don't skip. They don't mind if we ask for the same story over again.

Everybody should try to have a grandmother, especially if you don't have television, because they are the only grown ups who like to spend time with us.

They know we should have snack-time before bedtime and they say prayers with us every time, and kiss us even when we've acted bad.

So, parents, ask your little ones to tell you what they think grandparents are. And for you little ones, the next time you see your grandma or grandpa, give them a big hug to show how much you love them. We grandparents need all the sweetness to keep us young at heart.