

Is our love of modern parenting manuals eroding a mother's basic instincts? Granny certainly thinks so

- 22% feel parenting books are 'of no help' and 'can be quite harmful'
- Many grandparents feel they are not used enough as a source of advice

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When it comes to raising children, they purport to have the answers to just about everything.

But modern parenting manuals are so overbearing that they actually stunt mothers' natural instincts.

This, at least, is the view of an army of women who are experts on the topic in their own right: grandmothers.



Grandparents seem to think the latest trend to read parenting books and websites is not helpful

More than a third of British grandmothers feel that so-called parenting 'gurus' have eroded natural maternal abilities, with experts such as Gina Ford, pioneer of the controversial 'controlled crying' technique, stopping mothers from thinking for themselves.

What's more, many grandmothers, who brought their own children up in the 1970s and 1980s, believe they themselves are a much better source of information.

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A CENTURY OF ADVICE

FREDERIC TRUBY KING
Sir Frederic's 1907 book, *Feeding And Care Of Baby*, popular in the 1950s, advocates a strict timetable for babies, including leaving them alone to cry.

BENJAMIN SPOCK
The US paediatrician's 1946 *Baby And Childcare* argues children should be allowed to sleep in their parents' room.

JEAN LIEDLOFF
The anthropologist's

1975 *The Continuum Concept* advocates skin-to-skin contact between babies and parents.

PENELOPE LEACH
Guru of choice in the 1980s, she was a loud critic of those who leave their babies to cry.

GINA FORD
Ford's 1999 *The Contented Little Baby Book* urges new mothers to let their babies cry themselves to sleep via 'controlled crying'.

Although childcare advice has been around for more than a century, it was only in the past few decades that the cult of the 'celebrity' childcare guru has blossomed.

Helped by the internet, the amount of information aimed at new mothers has reached overwhelming proportions.

Yet, in a poll by Grannynet, a social networking site for grandparents, 60 per cent of respondents said they had no need for a parenting book when they were expecting or when their children were growing up.

Almost 65 per cent said they took advice instead from their mother or mother-in-law, while 46 per cent said they simply listened to their own instincts.

A further 37 per cent said they listened to a health visitor and 28 per cent said they got tips from friends.

Of the 38 per cent that did refer to a parenting book when younger, the most popular titles were from doctors including Benjamin Spock, the expert popular in the 1950s and 1960s.

Others took advice from baby departments at Mothercare and Marks & Spencer.



Many grandparents feel they are not used enough as a source of advice and that modern mother's instincts are often undermined by parenting books

In contrast, the grandmothers said their daughters were increasingly turning to parenting 'gurus' for tips on how to bring up their own children.

Almost 50 per cent said their daughters read books by childcare experts Miss Ford and Tracy Hogg, with many also turning to blogs and websites.

However, only 16 per cent of grandmothers surveyed said they regarded such guides as 'very helpful'.

More than 20 per cent felt they were actually 'quite harmful', with comments including 'too many offering different advice'. One grandmother said: 'Some are very good at making mothers feel guilty.'

Verity Gill, founder of Grannynet, said: 'We have been seeing more and more grandmothers talking about their concerns on the forum about the effect parenting books were having on their children.'

'They feel new mums are getting very confused and hung up on advice issued by the overwhelming amount of parenting books out there.'

'We think it's important for mothers to be encouraged to discover their own inner instincts – something books can overlook.'