

Britain's Parents Beware: Our "babysitter grandparents" could strike too

The threatened strike of Spanish grandparentsⁱ should make the UK's government, employers but most crucially its parents, take heed. We must acknowledge the substantial financial contributionⁱⁱ grandparents make towards childcare within our families and the economy, or we too could face a strike by our unrecognised and unpaid workforce. How can we prevent this from happening to us? Grannynet.co.uk, a website established to support the nation's 7 million grandmothersⁱⁱⁱ believes that the so-called "babysitter grandparents" issue can be dealt with where it all begins; at home. According to the recent 'Grandparents' Charter' survey carried out by grannynet.co.uk and BabyCentre UK, 78% of grandparents and parents agreed that families should establish some kind of formal childcare arrangement when grandparents were providing the childcare. Founder Verity Gill says: "Entering into childcare arrangements with parents is a serious matter. We believe that each family needs to take ownership of the problem and deal with it upfront, in a thoughtful manner."

When asked about the issue of whether they should be paid or not, grandparents were equally divided with 49% saying yes to payment and 51% saying no. Many felt that looking after grandchildren was a privilege, but also felt that they should not be left considerably out of pocket when looking after them. However, the majority of parents, 61%, felt that they should offer to pay grandparents to look after their children. Both statistics point towards the fact that this is one of a number of issues that need proper discussion.

Essentially, the problem all boils down to communication, so to help avoid family tension, grannynet has launched its grannynet Ground Rules. A 'contract' can be downloaded from its website which prompts families to talk over these

contentious issues and agree upon an approach. [Grannynet](#) believes this could save a lot of misunderstanding, arguments and, worst of all, quitting.

Verity says "Our contract focuses on the six subjects that families find the hardest to talk about and are therefore the issues that can end up causing the most problems. Our aim is to get parents and grandparents talking and agreeing to some ground rules that meets the needs of parents, grandparents and grandchildren alike. We have tried to keep the document as light hearted as possible and really hope that it will prompt discussion and help smooth the way."

With 1 in 3 families relying on grandparents for childcare^{iv}, the need to establish where simple grandparenting ends and official childminding begins has never been more pressing.

In this new age of austerity we must look after the one workforce who often actually *do* do it for the love.

The 'grannynet Ground Rules' can be downloaded from the [grannynet](#) website at <http://www.grannynet.co.uk/groundrules.pdf>.

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For further information, interviews and case study examples, please contact: Charlotte Lloyd Owen on 01444 417853 or email charlotte@grannynet.co.uk

Note to editors:

About [grannynet.co.uk](#): Founded in 2007 by Verity Gill, is the grandparents' website offering tips and support for grandparents.

Commenting on [grannynet.co.uk](#) Dr Miriam Stoppard, OBE *"All grandparents need support and I can't think of a better way of finding that support than by logging on to grannynet, where grandparents will find lots of useful information and will automatically join a friendly family network of other grandparents. It's a way of making being a grandparent more joyful and fulfilling than ever before."*

*Statistical information

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from the Grandparents' Charter survey, conducted by grannynet.co.uk in conjunction with BabyCentre UK, a parenting

support website. Total sample size was 846 grandparents and parents. Participation in the survey was voluntary with no monetary reward or benefit offered.

ⁱ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/24/spain-grandparents-childcare-strike-union>

ⁱⁱ In November 2009, specialist insurer for the over-50s RIAS found 6.1 million older Britons look after their grandchildren regularly for nothing. This saves families, typically, around £860 a year which adds up to £5.2 billion across the whole country.

ⁱⁱⁱ Future Foundation

^{iv} Report by Grandparents Plus, June 2010