

The Grannynet Ground Rules

- Help with arranging childcare within the family -

The reasons for ground rules:

Last year we launched our Grandparents' Charter on Grannynet and BabyCentre UK (a parenting support website) - a survey conducted online to find out what you really thought about caring for your grandchildren. We wanted to know your thoughts on various issues; such as how many days you thought it was appropriate to be asked to look after your grandchildren, whether you should be paid or not and how you felt about discipline. We received an overwhelming response with 846 replies and thankfully you really shared your thoughts.

One thing nearly all of you agreed on - in fact 78% of parents and grandparents - was the need to establish some ground rules on this, potentially tricky, childcare arrangement.

Here are just some of your comments:

"Consistency is important - but so is flexibility. There should be a few very basic ground rules, if only to forestall 'playing off' parents against grandparents, but with 'wiggle room' for learning that different people have different attitudes."

"... we have had a long chat about it today and decided that we are going to impose some basic restrictions that may help us - the care must be in our home (theirs is chaotic and sends us scatty), and if it's for several consecutive days we will have them sleep over or even rent a cottage at the seaside and go off for the duration - gives us at least a shot at consistency. Feel a bit better already!"

"ABSOLUTELY!!! (There should be ground rules established) We didn't and now it's a nightmare. It's caused real problems and tension in the family and how I wish wish wish that we had written up an agreement in advance."

"I think both parties need to be completely honest about their needs and expectations (and guidelines on custard creams and other treats!!!)."

"It is only fair on the child that all the people that are caring for them are on the same page."

Now we know from experience that many of the issues, such as payment and discipline etc can be hard to talk about, so we thought it would help if we created 'The Grannynet Ground Rules'. You can use this as a guide to sit down and run through with your family. We hope it helps make discussions about childcare arrangements easier and run more smoothly.

A document may seem a little formal, but setting a few ground rules before an arrangement begins can save a lot of tears, frustration and heartache in the future, because after all, this is family we are talking about!

We have done our best to make the tone of 'The Grannynet Ground Rules' as informal as possible... they are not meant to be legally enforceable after all! They are designed to form more of a discussion document really, covering the important points that you need to agree on. So put the kettle on, get out the custard creams and look forward to a future of happy childcare arrangements that work for you, your family and your grandchildren.

THE GRANNYNET GROUND RULES

This document represents an agreement between:

.....
Grandparent

.....
Parent

Date:

Recommendation for review in 6 months

1. How many days/hours a week?

Points for discussion:

- How many days/hours does each party think is necessary/acceptable?
- What about evenings/babysitting?

What the survey revealed:

37% of grandparents felt it would be appropriate to be asked to look after their grandchildren for two days a week and 22% felt that three days was appropriate. Most of our grandparents felt that it depended on the circumstances, but full time care would be physically overwhelming. Grandparents also felt that it was important to be able to say 'no' when they needed to, as their health should come first. 29% of parents felt it was appropriate to ask for only two days a week.

Grannynetters' comments:

"I enjoy it...but they do wear me out and if I was committed to caring for them on a regular basis every week, well, it might spoil the lovely relationship we have at the moment."

"Its hard work tho' with the two of them, we have to have eyes in the back of our heads.. I don't think that we could do it EVERY day."

Parents' comments:

"I think it would depend on circumstances of grandparents e.g. if they worked/had any other weekly commitments and also on their ability/physical health etc/proximity to child's home if they are coming to child's for home for travel etc and whether they were able to stay over, but I think 2/3 days would be appropriate."

"I think that 2-3 days is the maximum. My mum looks after my sister's son (3) every day from 9-2 and she is exhausted by the end of the week. She also feels obligated to do the childcare and therefore doesn't take as many holidays as she would like as she is conscious that my sister will have to find childcare and that it will be costly."

"I would say once a week would be an invaluable marker in any Mum's week."

Notes on discussion:

DECISION MADE:

2. To pay or not to pay?

Points for discussion:

- Is payment offered/expected? If so, how much?
- If not, should parents provide the odd treat as a 'thank-you' or perhaps cover any travel costs?
- Is the grandparent going to train as a childminder?
- Have you looked into National Insurance contributions?

What the survey revealed:

Grandparents were split pretty much down the middle over this issue. 49% said yes to payment and 51% said 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. Many also felt there should be an offer if the arrangement is permanent and regular, but not if the arrangement is just occasional babysitting. However, 61% of parents surveyed on BabyCentre UK felt that they should offer to pay grandparents to look after their children!

Grannynettters' comments:

"I wouldn't want to be paid and I would feel really hurt and offended if money was offered. However, it is nice to be appreciated and to receive the occasional bunch of flowers or other small gift is something I treasure."

"... why should grandparents be second class citizens? If help is given for childcare then it should cover all childcare whether purchased on the open market or gained through trusted relatives. If this means we are subject to certain regulations for protection of the child then so be it. Hopefully none of us have anything to fear after all we have managed to bring up one of the child's parents and they still trust us with their own child!"

Parents' comments:

"I cannot afford to pay them, but I try to ensure they have train fares and money for tea and cake....they are just happy to spend time with my daughter and a treat helps!"

"If grandparents are regularly providing childcare, I think it would be nice if the parents were to offer some kind of recompense, whether payment or help or whatever. The grandparents can always say no!"

Notes on discussion:

DECISION MADE:

3. Your place or mine?

This is more important to establish early on than you might think.

Points for discussion:

- Will the grandchildren be looked after at home or at their grandparent's house?
- Are the parents happy for the grandparents to take the children out without prior knowledge?

What the survey revealed:

There is a real skew, 70% in fact, towards grandparents wanting to look after grandchildren at their own houses and not at their grandchild's. Most like the fact that they are able to function better in their own home. However, most parents, 55%, would prefer if the looking after took place in their home.

Grannynettors' comments:

"This depends on the homes, of course, and the logistics of travel for family or grandparents. Ideally, a bit of each: child's house is familiar setting for usual routines, has familiar toys, books, pets, foods etc, so is probably best for routine care; but grandma's house is interesting because different, sometimes with different places to walk/play, maybe some different 'special' amusements - and is easier for grandparents to function in."

"Sometimes it is my house, sometimes theirs, depends on various things. Grandma's house is often somewhere special to come to, and personally I prefer to have her at my house. But surely it is just totally a matter of convenience and circumstances."

Parents' comments:

"So many factors need to be taken into account, including (i) ability of grandparent to travel to child's home and vice versa, (ii) location of each home (e.g. grandparents' home might be nearer park, beach, mother's work etc) (iii) type of house e.g. one house may be larger, better garden etc. Each family should decide what is appropriate for them."

"It depends on your priorities, age of child and proximity of grandparent's home. For a young child I'd say grandchildren's home whereas for an older child grandparent's house."

"It would be important that the child is looked after where the grandparent feels most comfortable. Also it will depend whether child would be comfortable there, however, it is also good for child to spend time in different environments and get used to being comfortable away from home."

Notes on discussion:

DECISION MADE:

4. Expenses & equipment



Points for discussion:

- If the grandchildren are being looked after in their grandparents' home, who should provide the equipment for the children?
- Should the grandparent have a kitty?



What the survey revealed:

71% of grandparents and 85% of parents felt that it is the parents' responsibility to provide the equipment needed to look after their grandchildren.

Grannynettters' comments:

"I have all the equipment as if the twins were living here with me. This way I get to see more of them and my daughter as she is not rushing off as she feels uncomfortable at my house. She comes every weekday and stays till the evening."

"If I was caring for them as a child minder I guess we would need to share the purchase of toys, clothes, nappies and food. Especially if there were no payments involved."

Parents' comments:

"I think that if grandparents are looking after them in their home then parents should definitely provide all the necessary equipment."

"In my experience, grandparents quite like getting all the equipment themselves. eBay could be a great source for second hand stuff. But if money is tight they shouldn't be afraid to ask for financial support to help pay for it. No reason why grandparents should have to foot the bill for this."



Notes on discussion:



DECISION MADE:

5. Feeding arrangements

Points for discussion:

- Who should be responsible for providing the children's meals?
- If it's the grandparents should they be given a budget?
- Do you need to draw up some ground rules on things like sweets and snacks?
- Is there a preferred meal structure such as how, when or where?

What the survey revealed:

68% of grandparents felt that they should be responsible for organising the grandchildren's food when they are in their care. They would like the chance to serve up something different. However, 66% of parents think they should be responsible for providing the child's meals.

Grannynettors' comments:

"Diet may be a great bone of contention if the adults don't agree about how much of what is healthy! If the parents have very inflexible ideas about diet, maybe they should provide all the food - but the child is likely to be the loser, with less chance to sample food that is different or cooked/presented differently. Better, perhaps, to have 'home' food in the child's home, but grandma's food (augmented with familiar items) at grandmas."

"Make sure you decide from the outset... I would make sure that we agreed from the outset who was paying or providing for what in relation to food, toys nappies etc."

Parents' comments:

"It depends on how you feel about the grandparent's cooking... or how strict you are about what you want your child to eat. Perhaps it is easier to give babies food you have made yourself but as they get bigger it is good for kids to have to try different foods and eat what other people are eating."

"I think this is dictated by the relationship you have with the grandparent. Most I know would happily provide the food but if there is any hint of past comments etc then I reckon its better to just provide the food / or money each week to cover expenses."

"I think it depends on how fussy the children are and how strict the parents are. Cooking lunch when you are eating yourself is not a big deal but if the parents only want the children to have certain foods then they should provide them."

Notes on discussion:

DECISION MADE:

6. Discipline

Points for discussion:

- Is the grandparent allowed a free reign on discipline?
- Try and discuss appropriate punishments and rewards (i.e. a naughty step, what should the reaction be to tantrums?)

What the survey revealed:

66% of grandparents felt that they should be able to discipline and reward as they chose. Most felt however that there should be a consistency between their care and that of the parents. In the parents' survey, 53% thought grandparents should not be able to discipline and reward their grandchildren as they chose.

Grannynettors' comments:

"There's no reason children shouldn't learn that parents and grandparents may set slightly different boundaries and have their own ways of encouragement or setting and enforcing limits, but the basics (permissible and forbidden behaviour, types of sanctions and rewards acceptable) must be agreed with parents if child is not to become spoilt or adults argue."

"...your grandchildren are NOT yours to bring up and I remember how irritating it was when my own mother-in-law kept doing exactly what she'd been asked (nicely!) not to do. I wouldn't dream of doing anything that my son and daughter-in-law disagreed with - it really isn't up to me, any more than I would criticise what they were doing."

Parents' comments:

"An 'employment contract' should leave much to the grandparents discretion, but guidelines for something as important as discipline and reward should be laid down by the parent. It is the parent who will have to deal with the child's behaviour in the longer term."

"Discipline and rewards is such a tricky area that communication is crucial before grandparents start childcare because I've seen it upset a lot of families unnecessarily."

Notes on discussion:

DECISION MADE:

Statistical information

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from the Grandparents' Charter survey, conducted by Grannynet.co.uk in conjunction with BabyCentre UK. Total sample size was 846 grandparents and parents. Participation in the survey was voluntary with no monetary reward or benefit offered.

The Grannynet Ground Rules is not intended to create legal relations and nothing in the document is intended to create an employment relationship.