

A granny's safety net Help and advice online

The danger of exploiting grandparents and asking them to drop everything to make the lives of their children easier, was recognised by Verity Gill when she set up grannynet.co.uk.

Nursery places were at such a premium near her home in East Dulwich, South London, that there was an 18-month waiting list. So after giving birth to Every last October, she asked her mother, Loma, to help out.

"It was such a godsend to have my mum to look after Every when I was at work. Talking to other new mums, I realised how many of us relied on our own parents," Gill says. "That's when I got the idea of [grannynet](http://grannynet.co.uk). There are so many sites dedicated to helping mums with childcare issues, but I was really struck by the fact that grandparents weren't catered for."

According to Age Concern, grandparents now provide some form of childcare for more than 80 per cent of children in the UK. Many of them, like Loma, are already internet-savvy and are growing in numbers.

Grannynet, the next generation's answer to the hugely successful web forum mumsnet.co.uk, reminds grandparents when children should be weaned, where to buy good clothes and toys, how to entertain children, and how to negotiate looking after their grandchild with the family.

The website is also asking grandparents for their views on some of the thornier issues of care-giving — such as payment: should there be a contract; how much care time is reasonable — to create a Grandparent's Charter. "I'd seen how Mum had worked things out with my sister, who was responsible for working out food, sleep, play arrangements and so on," Gill says. "Often they battered it out, but with emotional arguments. You can make it as professional a relationship as you like, but the charter will be there for people to use as a reference."

Ultimately, Gill believes the site could unite thousands of grandparents who are unsure of their new role and are seeking to work it out and find solace with others in the same boat. ALEXANDRA BLAIR