



The Importance of Grandparents

This article is provided by **Mike McManus** with *Ethics and Religion*.

Sunday, September 13th was Grandparent's Day.

In 1973, a West Virginia mom, Marian McQuade, persuaded her state to set aside a day to honor grandparents. Jimmy Carter signed a proclamation in 1976 that the Sunday after Labor Day should be known as **Grandparents Day**.

As the grandparent of nine children, I had not heard of Grandparents Day until I saw stories this week in the press.

Did you know that three-quarters of grandparents take care of their grandchildren on a regular basis? And a surprising 72 percent of grandparents think that being a grandparent is the most important thing in their life! Fully 70 percent see their grandchildren at least once a week.

The positive influence grandparents have on their grandchildren's development is profound. They offer love and guidance, wisdom and knowledge. They pass on traditions and family stories, leaving behind a legacy to cherish.

What's new is the 44 percent increase of grandchildren who are living with their grandparents. By 1997, nearly four million children, or 5.4 percent of all children, lived in a household headed by a grandparent. In about one-third of these homes, neither biological parent is present. The number of these "skipped generation" families is growing at a rapid pace.

In 2011, the U.S. Census estimated that 24 percent of children under the age of five were routinely cared for by a grandparent. When MetLife asked grandparents in 2012 why they were providing care, they replied, *"because I enjoy doing it."* Unlike the first time around (when they were raising their own children), they are more confident and relaxed around kids, which makes them excellent playing buddies and role models.

"Playing buddies?" Yes! Often when we hear the word 'grandparent,' we think of an elderly person. However, MetLife reports that the average age of grandparents is between 46–64 years old!





More than one in ten grandparents have cared for a grandchild for at least six months, while most of whom have been engaged for a far longer time. A disproportionate number of grandparents are caring for children of single women, African Americans, and low income people.

Here are five reasons grandparents are so important:

- 1. Grandparents impact their grandchildren's lives.** Nine out of 10 adult grandchildren feel their grandparents influenced their beliefs and values. Grandparents are some of the best partners when it comes to using creativity and imagination to discover the wonders of life. Through regular contact, a sense of emotional intimacy, and unwavering support, children can experience what a true positive relationship should look like.
- 2. Grandparents can greatly reduce household stress.** A 2014 study of Boston College found that "an emotionally close relationship between a grandparent and a grandchild is associated with fewer symptoms of depression for both generations." For kids, having grandparents around means having the perfect companions to play with and have fun. In turn, most grandparents truly love their role. According to the American Grandparents Association, 72 percent of grandparents think that being a grandparent is the single most important and satisfying thing in their life.
- 3. Grandparents have a great deal of experience.** They are a valuable resource because they have so many stories and experience from their own lives to share. Oftentimes, children will listen to their grandparents when they are not listening to their own parents or other adults. Grandparents also offer a link to a child's cultural history and family heritage. Children understand more of who they are, and where they come from, through their connection with their grandparents.
- 4. Grandparents provide a sense of security.** Especially during tough times, having an extra layer of support can make a big difference in a child's life. Studies have shown that a close grandparent-grandchild relationship during the teenage years are associated with less behavioral and emotional problems and fewer social difficulties with peers. Grandparents offer an extra ear when kids need someone to talk to because sometimes children find it easier to be open and share their difficulties and problems with their grandparents.
- 5. Grandparents offer an affordable childcare option.** With both parents in many families working outside of the home, it is often the grandparents who play a vital role in raising today's youth. According to the 2010 Census, 2.7 million grandparents provide for the basic needs of a grandchild, while even more take care of their grandchildren on a regular basis.

Grandparents are really important!

