



**** UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 HOURS, THURSDAY 1 APRIL ****

‘Granny Guide’ launched to support crucial roles of grandparents

**From balancing work and care to resolving family conflict -
new handbook offers tips for nation’s grandparents**

Children’s Secretary Ed Balls and agony aunt Denise Robertson back new guide

A new guide for grandparents, *‘Family Life’*, is launched today by charity Grandparents Plus with advice and guidance on how grandparents can balance work and care, support teenagers and help families through difficult times. The new handbook is aimed at the millions of grandparents who are providing emotional, practical and financial support to families across the country.

There are over 14 million grandparents in the UK. With 1 in 3 families depending on them for childcare and more than 300,000 children being raised by their grandparents, *Family Life: a grandparents’ guide to supporting families through difficult times* answers many of the questions and tackles some of the key dilemmas facing grandparents, including:

- **A new baby:** *‘I want to help out but don’t want them to think I’m interfering’, ‘They haven’t got the baby into a routine- should I say something?’*
- **Work, life and caring:** *‘They assume I will look after the baby when they go back to work’, ‘I don’t expect to be paid, but I do feel taken for granted.’*
- **When money is tight:** *‘I think they are getting into debt – should I offer to help out?’ , ‘My son has lost his job, how can I help?’*
- **When parents part:** *‘My son isn’t seeing the children as often as he used to. I worry he will lose touch completely and so will I.’ ‘My daughter-in-law is stopping me seeing the grandchildren. Should I challenge this?’*
- **The teenage years:** *‘My teenage granddaughter confides in me rather than her mother. Should I tell her mum what is going on?’ , ‘My granddaughter is asking me questions about sex. Should I answer them?’*

- **Children with a disability or special needs:** *'I am the only person who they trust to care for my disabled grandson when they go to work. I feel I have no alternative but to help them but I' am finding it all a bit too much.'*
- **Times of crises:** *'I recently lost my husband and it's been a difficult time for all of us. My son and his children have been very upset so I don't like to talk about it but I'm finding it hard because I need to talk about him.'*

The guide, funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, is part of the Kids in the Middle campaign – a coalition of charities backed by the nation's agony aunts – which aims to promote better support children when family conflict arises.

Denise Robertson, agony aunt on ITV's This Morning, whose 'top ten tips' for grandparents are featured in the guide, said:

"This guide is designed to offer support and encouragement to grandparents – many of whom play an absolutely key role in their grandchildren's lives. As the pace and pressure of daily life increases, the contribution grandparents can make has never been more necessary and it's important their role is recognised."

Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus, said:

"We've drawn on the experiences and views of a wide range of grandparents and consulted with experts to put together the best advice possible for grandparents. It is time to take their role seriously and give them the help they need as they do what they can to support their families."

"We know that during the recession parents have been turning to grandparents for extra help with childcare, financial support and practical advice. There has never been a more important time to support family life."

The guide will be launched by Ed Balls and Denise Robertson at London Early Years Foundation's Marsham Street Community Nursery, which runs special sessions for grandparents and their grandchildren. It will be distributed to 3,500 children's centres across the country and is available free to all grandparents.

Children's Secretary Ed Balls said:

"I know that grandparents play an invaluable role in supporting family life and it's right that they have access to information and advice designed for them. That's why we have funded this new guide, which includes ten top tips from agony aunt Denise Robertson, to give grandparents the information and advice they need to help support their families."

"We are now giving grandparents the recognition they deserve. A new website, BeGrand.net, means they can share their experiences with fellow grandparents and access handy advice on issues that might affect them. We're also working to make sure that local services, like children's centres, are open to grandparents. And from April 2011, grandparents caring for children under 12 will be able to receive National Insurance contributions to recognise the care they provide to enable parents to work.

"Grandparents can be a valuable source of support for children and young people, particularly if their parents separate. This Government has removed a legal hurdle for grandparents in the courts, making it easier for them to apply for contact with their grandchildren to preserve this special relationship.

"And we're also working hard for those grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Last week the Budget announced that from April 2011 those who are caring for a relative's child will no longer have their discretionary payments from local authorities taken into account when being assessed for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. This will make the children and carers in these often vulnerable families better off."

June O'Sullivan, Chief Executive of London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) said:

"Our long term ambition at LEYF of building a better future for London's children is always strengthened through true and successful community cohesion; and the role played by grandparents as part of a close-knit extended family is crucial in this respect.

"Caring for over 1100 children and their families each year, we're eager to encourage the 'connected' engagement of both parents and *their* parents wherever possible. This may be a simple matter of grandparents bringing or collecting their grandchildren to and from nursery, getting more involved in regular drop-in sessions or workshops; it may equally be a case of their ongoing support of larger, community-based intergenerational projects we initiate or promote."

Ends.

The guide, *'Family Life'*, will be launched at London Early Years Foundation's **Marsham Street Community Nursery**, 121 Marsham Street on **Thursday 1 April at 3pm.**

Children's Secretary Ed Balls and This Morning agony aunt Denise Robertson will be at the launch.

For more information, an embargoed copy of the guide or for advanced interviews with Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus, please contact: **Melissa Milner**

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For more information on Grandparents Plus, see: <http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/>

For more information on Kids in the Middle, see: <http://kidsinthemiddle.org.uk/>

Family Life was produced by Grandparents Plus in association with: Kids in the Middle, One Plus One, The Grandparents' Association, Parentline Plus and Relate.

Grandparents – key facts

- 1 in 3 families rely on grandparents for **childcare**¹ which has been valued at £3.9 billion²
- Grandparents are the **sandwich generation**. 1 in 4 grandparents have a living parent, rising to 1 in 2 for working class households.³
- During the **recession** 4 out of 10 parents have been turning to grandparents for extra help with childcare and over half (57%) for practical advice and support. A further 3 out of 10 said they were likely to seek financial help.⁴
- 1 million grandparents have lost touch with their grandchildren as a result of parental **separation or divorce**.⁵
- 1 in 4 (27%) **teenagers** say they talk to grandparents about problems they couldn't discuss with their parents⁶
- Almost 9 out of 10 (86%) grandparents give teenagers money⁷
- Over 8 out of 10 (85%) young people say they respect what grandparents say.⁸
- **More than half of families with a disabled child** live on or near the margins of poverty⁹. Grandparents in these families play a considerable role in providing emotional, practical and financial support, particularly in times of crisis¹⁰.

¹ Office for National Statistics, Social Trends, April 2009.

² The economy of older people, Age Concern, 2004

³ Griggs, J. Protect, Support, Provide, Grandparents Plus, 2010

⁴ YouGov, Grandparents Plus Feb 2009.

⁵ Grandparents Association estimate, 2009

⁶ Buchanan, A and Griggs, J My Second Mum and Dad, 2009

⁷ Buchanan, Griggs Op cit 2009

⁸ Buchanan, Griggs Op cit 2009.

- **Ethnic minority households** are more likely to include a grandparent, parent and child living in under the same roof¹¹. This often leads to the expectation that grandparents will take on high levels of childcare¹².
- There are 300,000 **children being raised by grandparents** or other family members because of parental drug or alcohol misuse, abuse or neglect, domestic violence, bereavement, imprisonment or a combination of factors.
- **One in three carers** who are family or friends give up paid work when they take on the care of a child¹³, and a further three in 10 (30 per cent) reduce their paid working hours¹⁴.
- **Three out of four carers** who are family or friends experience financial hardship when they take on the care of a child¹⁵. (Approximately 200,000 families in Britain¹⁶). More than one in three of these carers (35 per cent) are single parent grandparents¹⁷.

⁹ Gordon, D., Parker, R., Loughran, F. and Heslop, P. (2000) Disabled children in Britain: a reanalysis of the OPCS disability surveys. London: Stationery Office.

¹⁰ Hastings, R. (1997) 'Grandparents of children with severe disabilities', *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 44(4): 329-340.

¹¹ Data from the Millennium Cohort Study (2004) in Broad, B. (2007) *Being a Grandparent: Research evidence: Key themes and policy recommendations*, Grandparents Association.

¹² Goodman, C. and Silverstein, M. (2002) 'Grandmothers Raising Grandchildren: Family Structure and Well-Being in Culturally Diverse Families', *The Gerontologist*, 42(5): 676-689.

¹³ Richards, 2001 in Hunt, J. (2001) *Family and Friends Carers*, Scoping paper prepared for the Department of Health; Grandparents Plus (2009) *Family and friends care: Recognition, respect, reward*.

¹⁴ Grandparents Plus (2009) *Family and friends care: Recognition, respect, reward*.

¹⁵ Farmer, E. and Moyers, S. (2008) *Fostering effective family and friends placements*.

¹⁶ Estimate from the Family Rights Group cited in Saunders and Selwyn, 'Supporting informal kinship care', *Adoption and fostering journal*, 32(2): 31-42, 2008.

¹⁷ Grandparents Plus (2009) *Recognition, respect, reward*: