



We champion the wider
family who care for children

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Grandparents should be paid for childcare and given 'granny leave' New poll shows 2 to 1 back financial support for grandparents as families face 'caring crunch'

Grandparents should be 'paid' tax credits for childcare and those in work given two weeks 'granny leave' to help care for newborn grandchildren according to a report published today by Grandparents Plus.

The report, '*Rethinking Family Life: exploring the role of grandparents and the wider family*', argues that grandparents are playing an ever-increasing role in family life by supporting parents and caring for children and we should do more to recognise the role they play. In particular:

- Parents should be able to claim childcare tax credit for grandparental childcare if it enables parents to return to work.
- Working grandparents providing childcare should be entitled to a credit towards their National Insurance in the same way that parents, foster carers and carers of disabled adults will be from April 2010.
- Grandparents should be entitled to special family leave of 'granny leave' of up to two weeks to be taken at any point in the child's first year. This could be introduced on a voluntary basis.
- Employers with flexible working practices should consider extending the right to grandparents.

The proposals are backed by the findings of a new YouGov survey of over 2000 people, commissioned by Grandparents Plus and released today.

It shows strong support for the role grandparents play and reveals that in the current economic crisis many parents will be turning back to their parents for childcare and financial support:

- 4 out of 10 (44%) said in the current economic climate that they were likely to seek more grandparental help with childcare, rising to over half (55%) of parents aged 18-34. A third (30%) said they were likely to seek financial help from their mum or dad.

- 6 out of 10 (61%) people agree that grandparents should receive some kind of reward or payment from the state for providing childcare.
- 3 out of 4 (75%) people agree that working age grandparents who provide substantial periods of childcare should receive a credit towards their basic state pension in the same way as parents of children under 12 and carers of disabled children and adults.
- And over half (55%) of people agree that grandparents should have the right to request flexible working in the same way as carers and parents of children under 6.

Commenting on the report and the poll findings Grandparents Plus Chief Executive, Sam Smethers said:

“We believe that the existing policy focus on the nuclear family means we miss what is really going on. Four in 10 parents say they are increasingly likely to ask grandparents for help with childcare during the recession. In the tough economic climate it is families who are taking the hit. Grandparents are playing an ever-increasing role in supporting family life and caring for children but their contribution often goes unrecognised.

“Our poll shows that the general public appreciates the important role that grandparents play but most people do not think the government values this highly enough. It is time to recognise the contribution grandparents make.”

Almost 9 out of 10 (87%) of the general public believe that grandparents are important in ensuring the wellbeing of their children. But 8 out of 10 (79%) people believe the Government does not value the role grandparents play in caring for children.

According to the poll, grandparents are the major source of advice and support for parents when a new baby is born. Parents were asked to identify up to three people or organisations who were important in helping support them and their immediate family when they had a baby. Their own mum or dad rated top at 63% with the doctor (36%), other health care professionals (34%) and friends (35%) and family (33%) rated at a third each.

Credit crunch

YouGov asked parents how the current financial situation would impact their ability to pay for childcare and the role of grandparents. The poll indicated that during the recession grandparents are likely to be cushioning families from some of the negative effects. In particular:

- 4 out of 10 (44%) said they were likely to seek more grandparental help with childcare, rising to over half (55%) of parents aged 18-34

- Almost a third said they were likely to seek financial help from their mum or dad. This rose to 4 out of 10 (39%) for Scottish parents and parents in London (39%). Parents in the Midlands were less likely to turn to their own mum or dad for financial help with only 1 in 5 (21%) saying this was likely.
- Over half (57%) of parents said they were likely to turn to grandparents for practical advice and support. But there was a gender gap as 7 out of 10 (68%) of mothers were likely to turn to grandparents in this way while less than half (47%) of fathers were likely to do so.

Children's Services & family and friends care

In circumstances where parents cannot care for a child themselves over 8 out of 10 (86%) people agreed that local authorities should always try to place a child with another member of their own family first before placing them into nonrelative foster care.

Parents were asked if they were ever unable to care for their own child who would they most trust to look after the welfare of their child. Choosing up to three options, almost two thirds (65%) said their own mum or dad. Over half (56%) identified other family while 1 in 4 (27%) chose friends. Only 1% chose children's services.

A further 8 out of 10 (80%) agreed that where grandparents step in to care for a child for over 28 days they should be entitled to financial help from the state with the cost.

The poll findings echo the conclusions of the Grandparents Plus report which calls on children's services and local authorities to support the role grandparents play. In particular:

- Children raised by grandparents should be treated as children in need by social services to ensure that they have all the necessary support.
- Social workers and managers should receive regular high quality kinship care training.
- Grandparents and other carers who are looking after a child for more than 28 days should be entitled to financial support. They should also receive financial help with one off costs such as beds and school uniforms.

GRANDPARENTS BY NUMBERS

14 million grandparents in the UK
1 in 4 families use grandparental childcare each week
1 in 4 families are headed by a single parent
1 in 2 single parents rely on grandparental childcare
3 in 10 grandparents are of working age
£3.9billion the value of grandparental childcare
1 in 2 grandparents has a living parent

Source: GRANDPARENTS PLUS: 'Rethinking Family Life: exploring the role of grandparents and the wider family'

Ends.

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Notes to Editors

1. 'Rethinking Family Life: exploring the role of grandparents and the wider family' is being launched by Rt Hon Beverley Hughes MP, Minister for Children, Schools and Families at the House of Commons on Wednesday 25th March 2009.
2. The full report is available from the Grandparents Plus website at: www.grandparentsplus.org.uk
3. Full details of the exclusive Grandparents Plus/YouGov poll are available at www.grandparentsplus.org.uk. For more online debate go to our friends at www.grannynet.co.uk
4. All poll figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,270 adults (including 1431 parents). Fieldwork was undertaken between 10th - 12th February 2009. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

About Grandparents Plus

Grandparents Plus is the national charity which champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives – especially where they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances. We work to support grandparents and the wider family by campaigning for change; providing evidence, policy solutions and training; and building alliances and networks, including with grandparents themselves so that they can have a voice.

Sam Smethers is Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus and is the former Director of Public Affairs of the Equal Opportunities Commission.