

Summary:

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Did you ever wonder what your grandchildren said about you when you were not around? This thought occurred to us while we were gathering data for a research project about grandparents being the primary care-givers in raising their grandchildren. Both of us are grandparents with 10 grandchildren between us, ranging in age from 1 year old to 10 years old. We were curious about what some 400 children, from grades 1 to 6, had to say about their grandmas and grandpas in particular and about grandparents, in general. We handed out surveys that required the children to complete a series of sentences. The following is an account of their responses in their own words.

My Grandmother is...

The majority of the children regardless of age, responded with words like "nice", "caring", "friendly", "good cook", and "the best". The children from grades 1-3 were very literal and usually wrote one-word answers such as "Indian". Although one third-grader wrote that his grandmother was "weird(sic) because she won't let me watch what I want to watch".

The older children were able to present their thoughts a little more clearly.

A fifth-grader wrote that his grandmother is "a nice person. Her favorite animal was Roadrunner". Seems like they watch a lot of cartoons together.

A sixth-grader wrote, "Alive and she loves me. I love her too but she never spells my name correctly. But she always remembers my birthday".

A fifth-grade girl responded, "She is kind of chunky, but nice. She spoils me. Sometimes she says NO but she spoils me".

Very few of the children had negative comments. One of the boys indicated that his grandmother was an "old fogie" while another wrote, "Nice but very old-fashioned. She believes that work is good for the soul. Whenever we go to her house we always have to work".

My Grandfather is...

To complete the phrase, My grandfather is...several of the children wrote many of the same comments that they wrote for grandmother. Comments like "nice" and "loving". There were many more children who responded to indicate that grandpa was, in their words, "dead". One fifth-grader wrote, "dead but he was a nice person", while another expressed a fear of death, "My grandfather is the nicest guy around. He has had a heart attack. I'll miss him when he's gone".

Unlike descriptions of grandmother, the word "smart" was written in several of the replies. "Very dear to me and very good in math. He is very smart", wrote one sixth grade boy. Another indicated "He helps me with social studies. He is smart in school studies, I am not".

Another sixth grader described his grandfather as an eccentric inventor. "Funny, Strange, a cigar smoker. Someone who tries to make his own things like gasoline. My grandfather tried to make 50 gallons of gas once. He figured, give me fifty gallons of anything and I'll make it into gas. It didn't work."

While none of the grandchildren described their grandmothers as being mean, a few of them indicated that this was so about their grandfathers. One of the fifth grade girls responded that he was "a very grumpy person. He drinks a lot but he is not an alcoholic". Another child wrote that grandpa was "mean, he hits me and yells at me."

The majority of the children expressed a lot of love for their grandfathers referring to them as "sweet", "loving", "wonderful". A comment which came up frequently was "funny". A sixth grade boy wrote, "Fun to be around. He always makes me laugh". Another indicated that grandpa was "nice and fun. I enjoy going to see him."

I like my grandmother best when...

Several themes emerged from the children's completion of this sentence, one of which was just spending time with grandmother. Other comments included sentiments like: "She gives me her undivided attention", "It's just her and me", "I'm alone with her", "We're alone together with no one else around", "She takes time for a walk or a drive and we talk and walk -talk about school and each other's lives".

Another theme that became apparent was that grandma gave the children things such as money, presents, treats, and candy. One fourth grade girl summed it up this way, "She buys me things, she spoils me".

Many of the children spoke of liking grandma best when they do things together; Things such as shopping, just sitting and watching TV, walking, playing cards, swimming, helping to study, baking cookies, painting their fingernails or reading together. The activity was not nearly as important as doing it together. Many of the children spoke of the pleasures of spending the night at grandma's and grandpa's.

All of the children liked the much more permissive attitude of grandmas as expressed in the following responses: "She lets me do what I want", "She doesn't lecture", "We stay up and play", "She agrees with me even when my parents don't".

A few of the children enjoyed the storytelling that grandparents generally seem to drift into. A third grade boy who identified his grandmother as an Indian, said that he liked it best when she told him stories about her tribe. Another child said, "She tells me funny stories about her life and how she and pop got together".

Several children mentioned grandma's cooking...said they liked the special meals she makes.

I like my grandfather best when...

When asked to complete, I like my grandfather best when...several of the children described some of the things they did with grandpa such as; "he takes me to the beach", "we watch sports", "he helps me put stuff together", "he takes me out to the ball game", "he teaches me to do something", "he takes me to expensive restaurants", " we are doing stuff with each other".

The main theme was the same as what they liked best about grandma...doing things together. These grandchildren also enjoyed the storytelling very much as can be seen from the following comments; "he tells me stories of when he was my age, I think they are cool", "he tells me about his life and also makes me laugh", "I can think of him and hear stories of what he was like. I compare things we have in common. He and I are very much alike" (*This grandfather had passed away*), "He got out the old picture slides".

Tell a funny story about one of your grandparents

Our grandchildren seem to find a great deal of humor in our failings. A fourth grade girl wrote; "Grandma looked at my wrist and thought that I had pen ink on me so she went into the bathroom to wash the ink off but we found it was my veins." Other comments along this line were; "she tries to skateboard, but can 't", "she doesn't throw well".

Some of the other children related the following anecdotes that they found amusing;

"My grandma was talking and a bug flew into her mouth. She didn't think it was funny but everyone else did."

"My grandmother has a hearing aid and when you try to tell her something you always have to repeat it. That's why I like talking to her, plus she listens too."

"One time my grandma took my cousin and me to the bowling alley and my grandma threw the ball and it rolled into the other lane and knocked that ball in that lane out of the way and my grandma got a strike (in the other lane)."

A few of the children seemed to have more adventuresome grandmothers as these comments suggest;

"My grandmother is funny. One day she tried out for a mud wrestling contest."

"One time my grandmother took us teepeeing. We teepeed my house and my uncle's. It was fun."

One of the children had a poignant story to tell. She said, "It's not funny. It's kind of sad in a way. She sits at her kitchen table talking to her coffee and spoon. It's like she's very lonely at night."

The children liked the idea that grandma could laugh at herself as can be seen in the following comments.

"My grandmother had a stroke. She cannot speak well. She always cusses because she gets frustrated. She laughs so I think that's pretty funny."

"Whenever she forgets something she laughs and I laugh too."

"When we climbed Stove Mountain, we climbed up and when it was time to climb down she said "I can't".

"My grandpa was making toast and he forgot to plug in the toaster. He got all mad when I came in and said, 'What is wrong?' I said it would help if you plugged it in."

"My grandpa has an imaginary list of all of the things he is supposed to do around the house that he has never done yet."

"When we went camping, my grandfather got sprayed by a skunk, and he had to sleep in the van."

"I was at their house and we were looking through an old photo album and we saw a picture of grandpa wearing shades. He looked weird, silly...and cool."

The grandchildren often mentioned how grandpa was fun and how he joked. One fifth grade girl wrote, "He put a hotdog in a banana peel and gave it to my sister".

The only thing I don't like about my grandparents is...

Many of the children wrote "nothing" which, according to kids, means that grandma and grandpa are perfect.

That they were treated unfairly by the grandparents was brought out by some of the children. Their responses included comments such as "my grandpa always gives my brother more than me because I'm a girl. He likes boys better", "They spend about seventy-cents on me and twenty-five dollars on someone else".

Other responses revolved around aging and death. The children did not like the fact that their grandparents continue to age and will die some day. They wrote, "too darned old", "they are not healthy", "to think that they're going to die", "that my grandma is dying", "when they die".

The children also noticed that the grandparents seem to worry more than their parents do. They wrote, "they're not used to what you do at home so they get worried sometimes", "they are way too cautious", "sometimes they treat me like a small kid", "she (grandma) is too careful about some things".

My grandparents are different from my parents because...

All of the children from the first through the sixth grade, were more or less unanimous in their feelings about grandparents as people who spoiled them and were not as strict with them

as their parents. Some of these feelings were, "they don't discipline me as much as my parents", "my grandparents spoil me rotten and my parents don't", "they don't punish me", "they let me get away with things", "my grandparents let me have my way a little more often than my parents", "when our parents say 'NO', they say, 'Oh let her do it!'"

The children wrote of grandparents having more time for them, of being better listeners than their parents, and giving them more presents. Several of them said that their grandparents are older, wiser and richer.

When I get to be a grandparent I'll...

The children completed this sentence with a description of their own grandparents. Many said that they would be just like them repeating the same thoughts of doing things with their grandchildren, spoiling them. Here are a few of their comments, "make it so that my grandchild has a good time like I had a good time", "I'll take them (grandchildren) places, do things with them and buy them all sorts of things", "always love my grandchildren no matter what", "spoil them rotten", "be very, very nice like then", "try to live to be as old as I can".

From the children's comments it appears that their grandparents have served as wonderful role models, teaching them how to be good grandparents.

My grandparents always say...

Many of the children said that their grandparents referred to the grandchildren's physical appearance with comments like, "boy, have you grown", "you grow every time I see you", "you're almost as tall as I am", "every time I see you, you're taller and sweeter".

The majority of the children remarked that grandparents gave them unsolicited advice. Their comments were reminiscent of the pithy sayings that our parents and grandparents repeated to us. Do you recognize any of these slogans?...

Save your money.

Eat this, it's good for you.

Lying gets you nowhere.

Keep clean and stay out of trouble.

Try your best.

It's what's on the inside that counts.

If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.

If you put your mind to it, you can do it.

Treat people the way you would like to be treated.

When you think about it, grandparents give some pretty darn good advice.

Overall, the children had very few negative feelings toward their grandparents. Several of them did not like the fact that a grandparent smoked or that grandparents worry so much about their grandchildren or that some day grandparents are going to die. These grandchildren really love their grandparents and especially enjoyed the time spent with

them. They like doing things with them such as shopping, watching television, cooking/baking, reading, playing cards or just going for a walk. It was not so much the activity as it was the attention and unconditional love that they received.

Our grandchildren seem to forgive and forget the hearing and vision losses and the memory lapses especially when we can laugh along with them at ourselves.

One granddaughter summarized the feelings of these children perfectly when she wrote, "I don't know any funny stories about them but I'll always love my grandma and grandpa."