



On becoming a grandparent



I became a grandparent for the first time in November last year and am now a proud 'grandma' to a lovely six-month-old little boy who is growing and changing daily. This article describes my experience, some of the joys and challenges I've faced and some of the issues I've had to think through. These will be different for everyone but many of the principles I've learnt are relevant in other family situations.

I'm a single grandparent, as I was widowed three and a half years ago, and I live 250 miles away from my family so have had to think through how to make our family circumstances work. I'm very fortunate because my lifestyle is flexible as I work from home and can visit about every six weeks. There is sadness that my husband is no longer here to share the joy of this stage of life and, at times, I've felt a bit overwhelmed as I've tried to support my family in the right way, following Godly principles. However, I'm not on my own as I'm part of a church family where there are people who love me and support me in that role and I'm very thankful for the advice and guidance I've been given by my pastor and his wife. It's very reassuring to be part of the extended family of God.

I learnt early on of the need to be flexible and listen to the Lord's leading as situations arose. I had planned to briefly visit my new grandchild when he was born, returning home so my daughter and her husband could spend the first two weeks on their own. However, my daughter was very unwell towards the end of her pregnancy and had a particularly long and difficult labour. They asked for my help so I changed my plans and spent time supporting both her and her husband during a four-day labour and the first few days at home, coming home to Suffolk once they were established and able to manage.

One of the big issues many grandparents face these days is that of childcare and the expectation that part of our role is to provide free childcare when parents return to work. I knew that was not to be my role as I have my own life and work in Suffolk and I believe that enables me to be a better parent and grandparent. There had been several conversations, some quite difficult, before he was born where this principle was established and it is now respected. I enjoy helping at times and look forward to babysitting one night next week, whilst visiting, to enable my daughter and her husband to spend some together. My daughter has been called for jury service later in the year and doesn't want him to go to childcare for two full weeks so I will plan a visit for a few days during that time to help, as a one-off.

Our family now has four generations as my mum, aged ninety, is still alive and lives in sheltered accommodation near my daughter. I've realised how important the individual relationships are and I always give individual time and value to both my mum and my daughter as well as spending time with my grandson and together as a family. I'm aware that my daughter has been quite hurt by some relationships where she feels she is no longer valued and people only focus on the baby when they visit.

Offering support without interference is an important principle and one I've had to work at. My daughter asks my advice regularly but also has her own ideas about some things. She chose to bottle-feed, which would not have been my advice, but, having discussed it, she made her choice and I have had to respect that and the advice I've given has been based on her choice, not on how I would have done things. Having been on the receiving end of much negative criticism when my own children were



young, I am mindful of not doing that to my daughter. She is a good mum and I seek to offer constructive advice, respectful of their ways of doing things.

Finally, and most importantly, I pray! I pray for them each day, for my grandson's life and wellbeing and that one day he will come to know the Lord for himself. My daughter and her husband don't go to church but are open for me to teach Christian values. It's an area which requires much prayer and sensitivity and, with each Christian festival and an impending Christening, I pray and consider what my input should be. Again, this is an area I value the input of my Christian family at church.

Becoming a grandparent has brought much joy and a few challenges that I've needed to think and pray through. As a result, my relationship with both my daughter and son-in-law has strengthened. I'm very thankful for the gift of new life to our family and that I have the Lord to lead and guide me in my new role and the support of my church family to help me.

Julie Gorton