

Family Roles and the Modern Grandparent



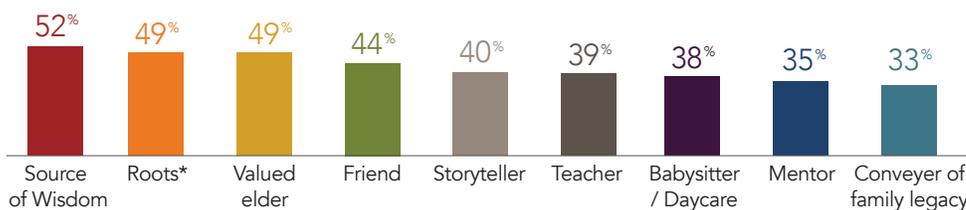
A new study on the modern grandparent demonstrates the different roles, joys, and challenges that today's grandparents experience.

Grandparents remain the bedrock of modern families with eighty-one percent of grandparents saying they play an important role in their grandchildren's lives. Although the fundamentals of the grandparenting role remain the same, changes in attitudes, technology, and our world have impacted how grandparents relate to and engage with their grandchildren. Grandparents hold increasingly progressive views about their grandchildren and society, but many are still holding on to traditional values and views on parenting.

Grandparents retain the title of respected elder.

While the mosaic of grandparent life today is changing, what hasn't changed is the grandparent's respected role in the family. Grandparents today largely view their role as imparting wisdom and knowledge to their grandchildren. When asked to define themselves across a variety of roles, the top roles they chose for themselves were as a source of wisdom (52%), the purveyor of family roots, heritage, and culture (49%), a valued elder (49%), and a friend (44%).

Roles that grandparents play in their grandchildren's lives



*Roots (i.e., family heritage, culture, history)

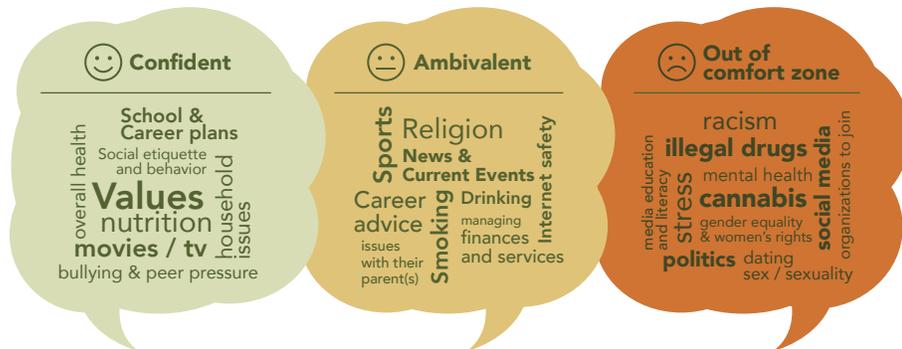
The Top Respected Role as a Grandparent

52% of grandparents view being a source of wisdom as their role.

"...grandparents are most comfortable providing support and guidance to grandkids..."

Grandparents strive to provide a compass on morals and values (53%) but shy away from discussions on divisive issues. In general, grandparents are most comfortable providing support and guidance to grandkids about topics related to personal aspirations or expectations. Four in ten are comfortable talking about social etiquette and nutrition. Grandparents are less comfortable discussing sensitive issues related to parenting in the 21st century such as drugs, social media, and politics.

Level of comfort with discussion topics



Grandparents are embracing multiculturalism and different sexualities.

As a whole, grandparents today have more multiracial grandchildren. In 2011, 16% said their grandchild was mixed race. In 2018, the number increased to 20%. For grandparents, embracing multiracial grandchildren is important. Only 17% say having different racial/ethnicity identities than their grandchild would make it difficult to relate. Nearly all grandparents (90%) say it is important that their multiracial grandchild knows about the heritage they share, and seven in ten (70%) make an effort to help their grandchildren learn about the heritage they do not share.

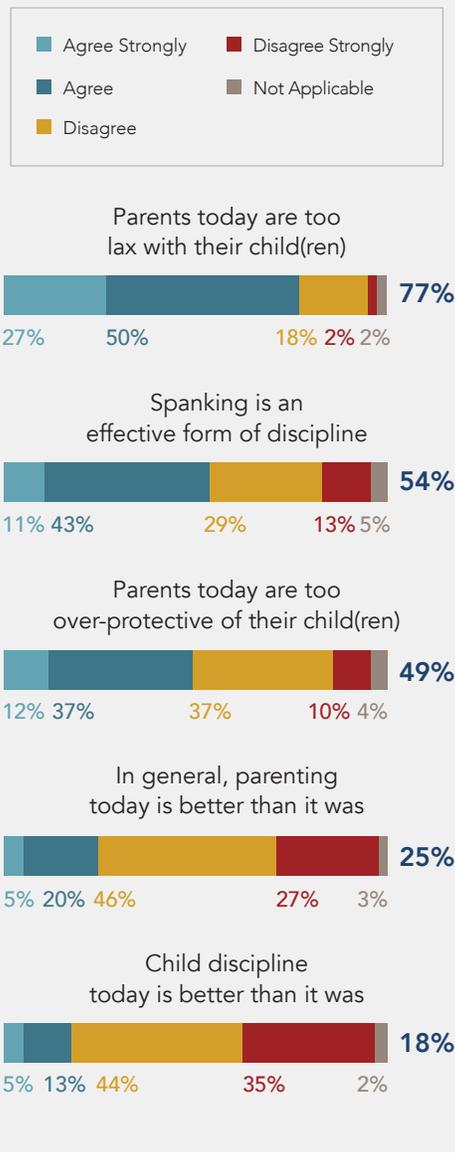
Grandparents are also navigating sexuality and gender norms. Today's grandparents are accepting of grandchildren's sexualities: 88% say if their grandchild came out to them as LGBT, they would accept them, and 37% agree that gender is non-binary (boys can identify as girls; girls can identify as boys). In addition, 51% of grandparents who identify as LGBT say that their grandchildren are supportive about them being LGBT.

Grandparents cautiously navigate their role with their own children.

Outwardly, grandparents are accepting of their role as advisor and friend to their grandchild and sit out many of the hard parenting issues. Inwardly, however, a majority of grandparents view their parenting style as superior to the parenting style of today's parents. Just 25% agree that parenting today is better than it was in their generation, and 77% agree that parents today are too lax with their children.

Grandparents are actively seeking information about the latest issues their grandchildren may be facing (20%), how to speak to their grandchildren about issues in their lives (20%), and how to connect with their grandchildren (17%). They also seek information on how to speak to their grandchild's parents about issues concerning their grandchild (17%).

Attitudes toward parenting



¹Xu, Jiaquan, et al. Mortality in the United States, 2015. NCHS Data Brief No. 267. Washington, DC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 2016.

Opportunities

Grandparents are contributing significantly to the raising of their grandchildren. They are the moral compass and the conveyer of family heritage, culture, and history. Grandparents are living longer and starting to have great-grandchildren. By 2030, more than 70% of the U.S. 8-year-olds will have a living great-grandparent¹. Helping grandparents find ways to share their knowledge and connect with their grandchildren will become more important.



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