

# Do Children Have a Right to a Relationship with Their Grandparents?

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*Abstract - Grandparent–grandchild relationships play a critical role in children’s emotional, social, and developmental wellbeing, particularly during periods of family disruption. This article examines whether children possess a moral, psychological, and legal right to maintain meaningful relationships with their grandparents. Drawing on interdisciplinary research from psychology, sociology, education, and family law, the paper explores how grandparental involvement contributes to emotional security, attachment formation, resilience, academic performance, and intergenerational continuity. It also analyzes the adverse effects of forced separation from grandparents, including emotional distress, behavioral challenges, and long-term relational insecurity. Cross-cultural perspectives and international legal frameworks are considered, highlighting variations in how societies recognize and protect these relationships. The article argues that sustained contact between children and grandparents serves the best interests of the child and should be supported through ethical family practices and child-centered legal policies. Recognizing grandparents as vital contributors to child development can help mitigate the emotional harm caused by family conflict, divorce, and social fragmentation.*

**Keywords:** *Grandparent–grandchild relationships, Child emotional development, Attachment theory, Family conflict and separation, Intergenerational bonds, Child wellbeing, Family law and visitation right*

## I. INTRODUCTION

A child’s emotional world is highly complex and often includes deep, meaningful bonds with grandparents. Grandparents can provide their children’s children with irreplaceable emotional security and attachment, often grounded in unconditional, long-term love that reflects the perspective and stability of an older generation. This form of affection, shaped by experience and continuity, frequently differs from parental care and can occupy a unique emotional space in a child’s development.

Many children lose their grandparents through the natural process of aging and death. However, a significant number lose these relationships

prematurely as a result of family conflict, divorce, or estrangement. Such losses raise a critical question: do children have a right to maintain a meaningful relationship with their grandparents?

This article examines the emotional, social, and developmental significance of grandparent–grandchild relationships. It explores the consequences of separation from grandparents and considers how such relationships might be preserved despite family disputes, with particular attention to the potential for long-term, intergenerational harm.

## II. UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF GRANDPARENT RELATIONSHIPS

The bonds children form early in life can have lasting effects on both their emotional development and the wellbeing of their grandparents. These relationships often become integral to the emotional lives of both generations, particularly as grandparents approach later stages of life.

Grandparents can offer children a distinctive sense of emotional security. There is a unique role that an older grandparent can play, one that cannot be easily replicated by others. Grandparents, especially those who are retired, often have greater time, patience, and emotional availability than parents who may be constrained by work demands, marital strain, or other pressures. As a result, grandparents may fill an important emotional gap.

An attentive grandparent can help a child feel genuinely valued and heard, fostering emotional calm and behavioral stability. Research indicates that children who know they are accepted and supported by older family members often experience positive emotional outcomes extending into adulthood. Emotional wellbeing later in life has been linked to early grandparental support, with warm memories serving as protective factors against stress (Stephenson & Carstensen, 2025). A strong multigenerational family identity can shape a child’s

self-worth, sense of belonging, and community engagement throughout development.

### III. EMOTIONAL SECURITY AND EARLY ATTACHMENT

The attachment between grandparents and grandchildren is frequently characterized by consistency and nurturing care. In times of family conflict or separation, grandparents may serve as emotional anchors, offering continuity, safety, and reassurance. Their presence can help children understand trust and relational stability through repeated, supportive interactions.

Through caregiving, emotional attentiveness, and physical presence, grandparents can add a valuable dimension to a child's upbringing. Studies of custodial grandfamilies suggest that attachment patterns and emotional strategies are transmitted across generations through caregiving relationships (Blake et al., 2023). These processes may enhance children's emotional awareness and social competence.

Grandparental support can also encourage children to explore the world with confidence while forming healthy relationships beyond the family. In the absence of such bonds, children may lack broader emotional perspectives and stability, particularly when family relationships become strained.

### IV. EFFECTS OF SEPARATION ON CHILD BEHAVIOR

Children who lose contact with their grandparents may experience emotional and behavioral difficulties, particularly when they do not understand the reasons for the separation. Confusion, sadness, and anger may emerge as children grapple with the loss of a significant attachment figure.

Research on family conflict-related separation shows that children often experience considerable distress when grandparental relationships are severed (Xu & Harrison, 2023). Such losses can destabilize emotional regulation and contribute to behavioral challenges, including difficulties at school. Whether separation occurs through death or conflict, the emotional burden may have long-term implications for self-esteem and psychological health.

### V. BUILDING STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE

Grandparents often strengthen family systems by alleviating parental stress and sharing caregiving responsibilities. Their involvement can enhance children's resilience, supporting their ability to cope with adversity.

Parental stress levels may decrease when grandparents contribute to household stability. Research indicates that grandparental involvement supports children's resilience by reducing parenting stress and reinforcing family strength (Wu et al., 2025). Through guidance and modeling, grandparents can teach coping skills and life strategies informed by experience, helping children navigate challenges with emotional maturity.

The removal of grandparents from a child's life can disrupt these protective processes, making it more difficult for families to manage change and loss across the life course.

### VI. LEARNING AND SCHOOL LIFE

Grandparents can play an important role in children's educational development by sharing stories, assisting with homework, and encouraging positive study habits. Their involvement may be particularly valuable when parents have limited time.

Empirical research suggests that higher levels of grandparental involvement are associated with improved academic performance, although outcomes vary depending on family structure and resources (Zanasi & Bordone, 2024).

### VII. EMOTIONAL GUIDANCE AND DISCIPLINE

Grandparents may influence children's behavior through their approaches to discipline, communication, and emotional regulation. These interactions can shape children's understanding of rules, empathy, and interpersonal boundaries (Li et al., 2019).

When grandparents are abruptly removed from family life, children may experience emotional gaps that parents alone cannot always fill, particularly during periods of heightened family stress. Such

losses can compromise children's ability to manage emotions and respond effectively to life challenges.

#### VIII. CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND AND COGNITIVE GROWTH

Research on left-behind children highlights the importance of supportive relationships with grandparents in fostering coping skills and cognitive development (He et al., 2025). Detachment from grandparents in these contexts may hinder emotional and cognitive growth, contributing to feelings of abandonment that persist into adulthood.

#### IX. CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES FROM JOINT FAMILIES

In many societies, particularly in South Asia, grandparents are central figures in child development. They transmit cultural values, traditions, and emotional wisdom across generations.

Studies of joint family systems in Pakistan demonstrate that children's emotional health and social competence often depend heavily on grandparents (Batool, 2024). Separation from grandparents in such contexts represents not only personal loss but also cultural disconnection, potentially undermining identity formation and respect for elders.

#### X. EMOTIONAL PAIN SHARED ACROSS GENERATIONS

Children are highly sensitive to disruptions in relationships with loved ones. When contact with grandparents is lost, children may experience grief even if the underlying conflict is concealed. Such losses can lead to enduring sorrow and emotional insecurity.

Research indicates that close grandparent–grandchild relationships also benefit grandparents' mental wellbeing (Barman & Sahoo, 2024). When contact is severed, both generations may suffer, with children experiencing guilt or helplessness and grandparents experiencing loss of purpose. These emotional consequences can have lasting developmental effects.

#### XI. WELLBEING OF ACTIVE GRANDPARENTS

Active involvement in childcare is often associated with improved psychological wellbeing among grandparents. Their patience and emotional stability can positively influence child development.

Studies show that supplementary caregiving enhances grandparents' wellbeing when it aligns with their strengths and capacities (Galarraga Cristóbal et al., 2025). Separation from grandchildren limits these benefits and reduces opportunities for children to experience supportive, non-disruptive care.

#### XII. LEGAL RIGHTS AND CHILD INTERESTS

The question of children's rights to maintain relationships with grandparents has legal dimensions. In some jurisdictions, family law recognizes grandparental contact as part of a child's right to family life. For example, Dutch law, grounded in human rights principles, acknowledges such contact under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (De Boer & Jonker, 2024).

Where legal protections exist, children are less likely to lose meaningful relationships due to adult conflict. In their absence, children may be exposed to emotional harm.

#### XIII. PUBLIC POLICY AROUND THE WORLD

Public policies regarding grandparental involvement vary widely across countries. Some systems recognize grandparents as integral caregivers, while others provide limited support (Hamilton et al., 2025). These differences have long-term implications for children's emotional security and societal cohesion.

#### XIV. VISITATION RIGHTS AND FAMILY CONFLICT

The issue most likely to exacerbate conflicts over grandparental care in cases of divorce and long-term separation relates to visitation rights. Issues of balance between parental authority and the emotional needs of children are often at the center of such discussions.

Some parents believe that support for extended contact between grandparents and children may contradict their parental role or interfere with their ability to make decisions regarding their children. In such cases, final determinations regarding visitation rights often depend on how these arrangements are structured and applied within real family settings (Keith & Wacker, 2002).

The responsibility for ensuring a stable emotional environment for the child lies in the development of flexible, family history-sensitive, and child-centered visitation rules. However, such rules can themselves become sources of stress and conflict among adults when they are rigid, unyielding, or imposed without consultation.

For a child who is separated from grandparents due to conflict between parents, the experience may be confusing, hurtful, and unfair, particularly when no one explains the situation in a way the child can emotionally understand. Children may consequently develop heightened fear and insecurity when they perceive that love can be withdrawn at any time. Such emotional damage, especially during family breakdown, can influence behavior, school performance, and trust in human relationships more broadly.

There is therefore an imperative to develop clear strategies focused on the wellbeing of the child with respect to grandparental relationships. These strategies must take precedence over adult conflict in order to minimize the harm caused by family breakdown and to help restore emotional balance in situations of parental separation or dysfunctional family environments.

#### XV. ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN FAMILIES

Debates surrounding the ethical dimensions of grandparent–grandchild relationships highlight issues of responsibility, care, and restraint. Grandparents should not interfere with the parental role, and power struggles within families are never appropriate.

At the same time, actions that enhance a child’s wellbeing and emotional safety are ethically justified and, in many cases, necessary (Draper, 2013). When ethical responsibilities are disregarded, children may

suffer significant harm. Divided loyalties can impair a child’s capacity to form secure emotional bonds. A breakdown of ethical conduct within family structures can lead to widespread estrangement and undermine a child’s sense of justice, safety, and trust. Such negative relational patterns and modes of intimacy may persist for decades.

#### XVI. ATTACHMENT ACROSS GENERATIONS

Attachment theory demonstrates that emotional patterns formed in childhood are highly likely to be replicated in adulthood and transmitted to future generations. The consistent presence of grandparents, particularly during periods of family turmoil or rupture, can help mitigate the emotional harm caused by divorce and other forms of trauma. Research has shown that grandparental attachment influences not only the emotional wellbeing of three generations (Gebhardt & Hoss, 2022), but also the development of parenting practices further into the future.

Children can develop profound and lasting emotional security when they are confident in their relationships with grandparents and do not experience a lack of emotional warmth. However, when these bonds are abruptly severed, children may begin to feel insecure and fear abandonment. This insecurity can affect their relationships with friends and partners and, ultimately, shape how they relate to their own children and grandchildren.

#### XVII. LONG-TERM IMPACT AND CONCLUSION

Adult life can be negatively affected by the absence of meaningful relationships with grandparents. Such consequences are not always apparent during childhood but may surface later in the form of difficulties with trust, empathy, and emotional openness.

Grandparents can exert a positive influence even within families experiencing breakdown. Their presence may help children feel loved and valued amid emotional division. This support can assist children in making constructive decisions later in life about belonging, trust, and relational reliance.

The absence of these connections can weaken emotional resilience and limit the capacity to form, sustain, and secure healthy relationships in adulthood. Research across cultures and legal

systems has established that long-term contact with grandparents benefits emotional wellbeing, educational outcomes, and overall family health. Children gain substantially in their capacity for empathy, patience, long-term commitment, and quality of life.

#### XVIII. CONCLUSION

Grandparental relationships play a significant role in shaping children's emotional wellbeing, values, and capacity to develop secure attachments, particularly during periods of family separation and trauma. Through their grandparents, children may receive love, stability, guidance, and a clearer sense of identity.

By contrast, separation from grandparents can result in lasting emotional harm, leading children to grow up confused and mistrustful, even toward their parents in adulthood. A growing body of research, cultural practices, and legal frameworks demonstrates that maintaining cross-generational relationships is beneficial for both children and elders.

In cases of family separation, it is essential that children's interests take precedence and that adult conflict or institutional shortcomings do not override their emotional needs. These relationships must be valued to foster empathy, resilience, and the capacity for love across the lifespan and into future generations. In this context, grandparents should be recognized as a substantial and often irreplaceable asset, deserving of legal, ethical, and cultural protection.

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