



Mott Poll Report

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When Parents and Grandparents Disagree

Grandparents play a special role in the lives of many children. But sometimes grandparents have different ideas than the child's parents about the best way to raise the child. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children ages 0-18 about disagreements with grandparents around their parenting choices.

Most parents (89%) report that their child sees at least one grandparent often or occasionally. Among these parents, 6% report *major* disagreements and 37% *minor* disagreements with one or more grandparents about their parenting choices. Fifteen percent of parents say that disagreements have a negative effect on their child's relationship with grandparents.

Forty percent of parents say disagreements occur because grandparents are too soft on the child, while 14% say grandparents are too tough; 46% say disagreements arise from both. The most common areas of disagreement are discipline (57%), meals/snacks (44%), and TV/screen time (36%). Other disagreements pertain to manners (27%), health/safety (25%), treating some grandchildren differently than others (22%), bedtime (21%), and sharing photos/information on social media (10%).

Four in ten parents (43%) have asked a grandparent to change their behavior to be consistent with the parent's choices or rules. In response to such a request, 47% of parents report the grandparent changed their behavior; 36% say the grandparent agreed to the request but did not change their behavior; and 17% say the grandparent refused the request to change. Among parents who say grandparents changed their behavior, only 4% report *major* disagreements. In comparison, among parents who say grandparents agreed to change but did not change their behavior, 15% report *major* disagreements; when grandparents refused to change, 25% of parents report *major* disagreements.

Overall, 15% of parents limit the amount of time their child sees some grandparents. These limitations are more common when grandparents do not respect parenting choices: 32% of parents limit the amount of time children see grandparents who agreed to but did not change their behavior, and 42% limit the amount of time children see grandparents who refused to change. In comparison, among parents who did not ask a grandparent to change their behavior, only 6% limit the amount of time their child sees grandparents.

Parents vs grandparents on raising children

Percent of parents reporting *major* or *minor* disagreements

Discipline 57%

Meals/snacks 44%

TV/screen time 36%

Manners 27%

Health/safety 25%



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2020

Report Highlights

4 in 10 parents describe disagreements with grandparents about discipline, meals, screen time and other parenting choices.

Among parents who asked a grandparent to be more consistent with parenting choices, 17% say the grandparent refused their request.

Parents are more likely to limit the amount of time children see grandparents who refuse to respect parenting choices.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in January-February 2020 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 0-18 years living in their household (n=2,016). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 60% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±1 to 4 percentage points and higher in subgroups.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the University of Michigan Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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Implications

Grandparents occupy a unique place in the lives of many children, sharing family stories and traditions, celebrating special occasions, and giving children one-on-one time and attention. Grandparents also can be a helpful resource to parents, sharing their own parenting experiences, offering support, and caring for children while parents are away.

However, problems can arise when grandparents contradict or interfere with the parenting choices or family rules that parents have established. This Mott Poll shows that disagreements between parents and grandparents are multifaceted. Many parents described the nature of disagreements as the grandparents being too lenient, which is consistent with the classic view of grandparents spoiling their grandchildren. Yet many parents noted that disagreements also arise when grandparents are too tough on their grandchildren.

Disagreements with grandparents, reported by nearly half of parents, reflect the range of parenting decisions and approaches. Some disagreements may stem from intergenerational differences. For example, some grandparents may insist that “the way we used to do things” is the correct way to parent. There have been changes in how society views certain parenting practices, such as spanking as a disciplinary tool or the age at which children can stay home alone. New research on child health and safety can lead to disagreements if grandparents refuse to put babies to sleep on their back or do not use a booster seat when driving grandchildren to preschool. Recent trends may also contribute to disagreements over parental decisions that grandparents did not face, such as when and where children use cell phones and other electronic devices.

Certain conflicts between parents and grandparents represent particularly sensitive situations. One area of disagreement involves grandparents posting photos or other personal information about grandchildren on social media. Grandparents may not appreciate the privacy considerations that often inform decisions about what and where to post on a public forum, and should talk with parents about their views on including children in social media posts. As grandchildren get older, grandparents might ask for their permission to share personal information on social media. Another delicate situation occurs if grandparents favor one grandchild over another; this can be especially hurtful to children, who may not understand why they are treated differently. Parents should ask grandparents to be more equitable in how they treat their grandchildren to avoid hurting the feelings of the less-favored child.

Parents may feel that their parental authority is undermined when grandparents are too lenient in allowing children to do things that are against family rules, or when grandparents are too strict in forbidding children to do things that parents have okayed.

In many cases, parents have tried to get grandparents to be more respectful of their parenting choices and household rules. These requests have mixed results: while about half of grandparents made a noticeable change in their behavior to be more consistent with how parents do things, some grandparents outright objected. Parents who said that grandparents refused such a request were more likely to put limits on the amount of time their child spends with grandparents. This finding suggests that grandparents should strive to understand and comply with parent requests to be more consistent with parenting choices, or risk losing special time with grandchildren.