

Case study for resolving conflicts with GRANDPARENTS.

Objectives:

1. Establishing your communication skills to be able to resolve conflicts carefully and peacefully.
2. Understanding and building upon one's own self-awareness and self-care patterns.
3. Understanding that how we deal with conflict impacts ourselves, our elderly, our family, and our peers.
4. Looking at the big-picture benefits of effective conflict resolution, from your elderly's perspective and from your end.
5. Establishing solid communication strategies which could help resolve conflicts.

Grandparents can play a wonderful role in children's lives and they make a unique contribution to families.

They can bring love, support, perspective, fun, free time and an extra pair of hands or listening ear. But relationships between parents and grandparents can also be fraught. It's not uncommon for parents to feel judged, undermined or intruded upon by grandparents' family interactions. And if you are lucky enough to have them close by, managing grandparents can become an ongoing challenge.

***Optional Kick-off:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvGzwkeS38w>, this video is a light way into making people aware of things that make their heart warm in relation to grandparents.

Introductory task:

1. The panel in this video speaks about why grandparents are an integral part of a family for some and far enough away to have to fly to for others. They delve into why this relationship can provide many great memories and, at times, some challenges. Watch this video together: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwiCVtj75G4> , reflect on what you can relate to and what you still cannot accept even if it seems normal to everyone. It is normal and healthy to have different perceptions. We all come from different backgrounds and we all give different definitions to things and actions. This video will act as a reflective aperture for the upcoming guide.

[The quick guide to managing grandparents, common conflicts and how to resolve them.](#)

1. Managing grandparents' unsolicited advice

The problem with unsolicited parenting advice is that we usually experience it as criticism. Being told what we 'should' be doing feels pretty much like being told that we are doing it ALL wrong. And when the topic in question is the most precious and sensitive in your whole life (aka your child), it seldom goes down well.

Resolution: Assume the best. Try to remember that the misplaced advice is almost certainly being given with good intentions. Grandparents know from experience how hard it can be raising children and they want to help (and to shortcut your learning for you). It is meant well, so try to avoid getting emotional or offended. If a grandparent offers unwanted advice, just nod and smile and do it your own way. Or make it clear that you value them but will ask for advice if you need it. (*"I really appreciate your support. I will definitely ask for advice if I need it, but I want to do this my way"*). If you find constant criticism hurtful, tell them that straight and ask them to stop.

2. Managing grandparents' overindulgence

The brilliant thing about being a grandparent is getting to share all the best bits of children but walking away from the difficult bits. Sometimes this comes out as full-on spoiling – buying excessive presents, feeding the kids chocolate, letting them do things they know they are not allowed.

Resolution: Most grandparents only get to see their grandchildren occasionally. They do not get all the lovely benefits of daily hugs and bedtime stories. So, they can be forgiven for trying to leverage some extra love and affection when they are around. A little bit of occasional and affectionate spoiling is not going to do any harm. So, if it is not getting out of control, try to be happy about the loving relationship your kids have with their grandparents. If it is too much or too often (or if grandparents are involved in regular childcare), you may need to set some rules. But you will find it easier to resolve if you acknowledge their needs and look for compromises. (*"I know it makes you happy to buy toys for Maria, but she already has so many and I want her to learn the value of things. Can we find a compromise that would keep us both happy?"*).

3. Overinvolved grandparents

Sometimes, grandparents expect unlimited access. They want to be in on everything. The first feed, the first bath, first steps, first words, first day at school... While involved grandparents can be a major bonus when it comes to getting some time to yourself, over-involvement can often come with a lot of opinions/advice/indulgence. Or it can just get in the way of you and your partner setting up your own family and building your life together.

Resolution: Grandparents can feel displaced from the centre of your life when a child comes along. Or maybe they are trying to work through mistakes they feel they made with their own children. Or perhaps, they just love being connected with their grandchildren and enjoy their company! Rather than pushing them away, try to set some habits that will help you manage the contact. You could say *"It's brilliant that you want to spend time with John, that's so supportive. He gets really grumpy when he is out of his routine, so it helps most if you come over in the afternoons/on Saturdays/for just a couple of hours."*

4. Disengaged grandparents

The opposite can also be a huge issue. Having young children is a tough period in any family and you may have expectations for support from your parents or parents-in-law that are not being met. Grandparents may be far away or happily filling their lives with all the things they could not do when they were younger because of work and children. If yours is not the first grandchild, they may have already got over the flush of excitement of being grandparents. Or being with kids just is not their thing.

Resolution: If you need help, be straightforward and ask for it. Do not allow reluctance to admit that you are struggling to get in the way. Be direct and ask for what you want. If they cannot give that, ask them what they might be able to do. They might just have been waiting for you to ask...

5. Managing grandparents who won't stick to your rules

This is a particular problem when grandparents are regularly involved in babysitting or childcare. Whereas occasional spoiling is acceptable, rule-breaking by grandparents who are part of your regular childcare arrangements is more problematic.

Resolution: Make the rules crystal clear. If problems arise, have constructive problem-solving discussions (away from the children). Own the problem, do not distribute blame. It is pivotal to aim for collaborative and explicit solutions: *"I find it really hard when you let Klara snack in the afternoons because then she does not eat her dinner and gets hungry right before bed. Please can we find a solution?"*

Talking through conflict: tips

- Stay calm, stop what you are doing, make eye contact, listen, and treat your parents/in-laws with respect.
- Let your parents/in-laws have their say. Be open to hearing your parents/in-laws' point of view. When they have finished, you can talk.
- Be open about your feelings. This can help your parents/in-laws' to understand why you want him/her to do or not do something. For example, "I feel worried about you giving everything Sarah asks for. I really wish she starts to understand the value of money and that it does not fall from trees", or "I feel that it is important for our family to celebrate dinner together. The TV is killing communication. Please do not let the children use technology during this special time".
- Explain your view simply and briefly, making it clear that your main concern is for your child's wellbeing, now and in the future. For example, "I need to make sure they learn to respect authority but that at the same time they are not afraid to fight for what they do not feel right".
- If you can, be prepared to negotiate with your parents/in-laws and compromise. When you compromise, you demonstrate problem-solving skills. For example, your parents/in-laws might want to buy a new car for your teenager, and you hate the idea of them just getting something without even working for it. A compromise might be that after suggesting they work for the summer with the prospects of buying a second-hand car, you come up with an agreement with your parents/in-laws that if they show dedication and they work, then you parents/in-laws can help them with extra money to buy a new one instead.
- If you have to say 'no', try to do it in a calm, understanding and respectful way. For example, "I understand that you want to buy him/her a new car. But right now, it is of utmost importance that he/she learns how hard it is to earn money. A job experience can not only give them an idea of the value of money but will also help them work and explore their dream job".

Dealing with conflict aftermath: tips

Despite your best efforts, it might take a while for you and your parents/in-laws to calm down after a conflict. Also, your parents/in-laws might feel disappointed if you have not given them the opportunity to be in your life and the life of your children as much as they would like to. Thus, it is fruitful to try and help your parents/in-laws to calm down by showing your understanding, letting him/her express his/her disappointment, or giving him/her space if he/she needs it. Again, remember to look after yourself, talking to someone you trust can help you feel better about the situation. When everyone is on the same page in the area of discipline, things run pretty smoothly.

Handling violence and toxic grandparents

Toxic grandparents are not harmless. Most of the time, we place importance on having an extended family, and grandparents are a big part of that. Toxic grandparents can be manipulative, controlling, self-serving individuals who can do a lot of damage if not kept in check.

If you are facing the problems of a toxic grandparent, these **10 signs** can help you understand the problem and navigate your way towards it:

1. Undermining you as a parent.
2. Denying having made any parenting mistakes.
3. Feeling entitled to time with grandchildren.
4. Playing victim.
5. Trying to buy the grandkids' love with gifts.
6. Manipulating to get what they want.
7. Meddling in your parenting choices.
8. Playing favourites with Grandkids.
9. Wanting to be 'Grandparent NO.1'
10. Telling your child critical or hurtful things.

Important to keep in mind:

It is normal for grandparents to exhibit meddling tendencies or to want to spoil the grandkids, however, toxic, or narcissistic people have severe emotional deficits that produce an entirely egocentric worldview. To them people are tools, and that includes children. They are a means to an end and since kids are known to be innocent and trusting, they are an easy prey for a manipulator. Moreover, if that comes from someone who has a track record of being an abusive parent, you have to be extra vigilant about allowing them near your children.

... when no one is the only solution and when toxic grandparents are hurting you and your children and refuses to acknowledge the harm and/or stop, cutting ties with them may be your only option.

Also, if you find it hard to control your own anger or violence towards your in laws/parents, you might also find professional help useful and for this you might wish to refer to the '[Service Directory](#)'.

First things first:

Most importantly, as a parent you have rights and responsibilities! Thus, it is important to keep in mind that:

- **You are to be treated with respect.**

You, along with everyone else in the family, have the right to be treated with respect. This includes not only parents and in laws/grandparents, but also siblings and extended family members who may be living in the home.

- **It is pivotal to set the rules and control privileges.**

You have the right to set rules and limit privileges when rules are not followed. If your reality falls under that of a toxic in law/grandparent, it is important that before you go 'no contact', you make sure that you have exhausted all other options prior to cutting ties permanently.

- **If all fails**

If all fails, and you believe that contact with the grandparents is damaging your child, let them go!

****Debriefing and reflection time:***

- 1) *How do conflicts with your parents/ in laws make you feel?*
- 2) *When faced with a conflict, the first question to ask yourself is: "what is really going on here?"*
- 3) *Did he/she really mean it like it sounded?*
- 4) *Is there some information I am missing here?*
- 5) *Am I looking at the situation from their viewpoint?*

- 6) *Have I attempted to put the shoe on the other foot?*
- 7) *Is my tone filled with accusations or compassion?*
- 8) *Am I attempting to isolate myself or press in closer to find a resolution?*
- 9) *Am I fighting for a win or fighting for peace?*
- 10) *Are my feelings and emotions rational or running wild?*
- 11) *If people I respected (outside of my family) were to hear my words, would I be embarrassed?*
- 12) *Am I expecting more from this person than they are equipped to give?*
- 13) *Have I thought of ways to compromise?*
- 14) *Am I offering them the benefit of the doubt or jumping to conclusions?*
- 15) *Am I letting love and grace lead my words or anger and disappointment?*
- 16) *Have I really tried to communicate?*
- 17) *Did I manage to make my difficult grandparent/ in law aware of how their actions affect me and my children?*
- 18) *Have I tried setting boundaries?*
- 19) *What about limited or supervised contact?*

Activity: 'Monumental'

Time: 15 to 20 minutes

Family Group Size: Any

Materials: Random items that you may find at home; a camera is optional

OBJECTIVES

- To understand our different perceptions of conflict, keeping in mind the age difference.
- To consider a different perspective on what we value most.
- To learn techniques to better handle conflict.
- To build trust and to unlearn things which we have taken for granted as a family.

- To understand that how we deal with conflict impacts ourselves, our family members and even our outside peers.
- To remember that family can be the most valuable asset in the world.

This activity helps family team members to:

- (1) create collaboratively
- (2) review and recap the concept of conflict resolution
- (3) become more comfortable with conflict,
- (4) consider the positive aspects of conflict, and
- (5) understand the possible benefits to themselves and the other family members.

Mode: After family lunch, ask everyone to bring back one or two random items (spoon, a book, a plant). Make sure to tell them they will be able to retrieve their items at the end of the session. If the family is big enough to create teams, go ahead. Tell team members they are to create a monument to the concept of conflict resolution, which they will be presenting to the family. Each part of the monument needs to represent something specific they learned about the concept. Each family must contribute at least one random item, and it is up to the team to creatively make it fit with the theme of the monument. Allow 10 to 15 minutes and begin the presentations.

Tips: Take a picture of each family member/team with their monument as a takeaway and a great memory trigger. These will be the memories which everyone will forever cherish!

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways did you collaborate to build your monuments?
2. What was challenging?
3. What was fun?
4. What will you remember?



Further discussion questions post activity:

1. Were your in laws/ grandparents' perspectives different from your perspective?
2. What were some things you learned by considering another's perspective?
3. Does discussing conflict like this make it "less scary"? In what ways?
4. Is conflict good or bad?
5. What are some ways in which conflict is detrimental to the family?
6. What are some ways in which conflict enriches the family?
7. How can you all understand each other better?

References/Further reading:

- How To Gracefully Handle Disrespectful In-Laws-
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCAcV9li6TA>
- 'The big book of conflict resolution games' -
<https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2070/2016/08/The-big-book-of-Conflict-Resolution-Games.pdf>
- 'The 6 most toxic in-laws — and what to do about them' -
<https://www.considerable.com/life/family/how-to-deal-with-difficult-in-laws/>
- 14 Effective Conflict Resolution Techniques-
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4sby5j4dTY>