Grandparenting

**Male Speaker**
Grandparents are getting more and more involved these days. But what does that mean for the children? Today, a new concept in helping grandparents help their families, and how to help out own kids understand the lessons of life. Brazelton on parenting.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
The role of the grandparent has changed dramatically over the past few generations. First, extended families were the norm, and grandparents played an active role in the day-to-day raising of the child. Then, as people moved away from neighborhoods for their careers, families became more nuclear, and I am afraid, more isolated.

Today, we are paying the price of that isolation, and turning back to traditional sources of support. We begin our look at the *new grandparent* with a unique program that is addressing a critical issue, grandparents who actually had to takeover the role of parent for their grandkids.

Shirley Washington: grandmother; Shirley is 66, and she had to take on her brand new role.

**Shirley Washington**
I have three grandchildren, two of them are with me most of the time.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
But Shirley had a problem, many in her position phase.

**Shirley Washington**
I was in a shelter, my apartment was flooded out previously. When you are searching for an apartment for 10 months, sometime you lose hope. But when this came up, it was an answer to my prayers.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
This is GrandFamilies House; a unique and innovative solution in supporting people like Shirley.

**Janet Van Zandt**
The GrandFamilies House is the first and still the only house in the nation that is specifically for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren without the parents present. For these the elders who are feeling the effects of the aging, at the same time that they decided to take on the challenge of raising young children, we wanted to create an environment that will support the families. We wanted to create a place that was physically suited for them, that had the grab bars in the bathroom, and the elevators, and the ramps, and also had playgrounds, and the childproof windows and the protections that you need for the kids.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
The need for places like this is growing.

**Janet Van Zandt**
There are now approximately a-million-and-a-half children who are living with their grandparents without their parents present.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Communities have to recognize the new realities and respond. City Councilman Mickey Roache, knows all too well.

***Mickey Roache***
I was probably the last one to know of the grandsons. One day I get home, and all of a sudden, I felt it was like a little bassinet or something. I figured out right away, this little baby boy was my grandson. 75% of the grandparents when asked what was the most important issue, it is housing. That is why this is so wonderful sitting here today in this GrandFamilies Home.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Program provides much more than housing.

**Janet Van Zandt**
Support services are specifically designed like pre-school and after-school to meet the needs of the grandchildren who often have been through a great deal of trauma. Many of them were abused or neglected, all of them have lost their parents in some fashion. They're kids who had a couple of strikes against them, to begin with, and the fact that we can build a community to support them is really important.

**Willi Cozart, Jr**
Living here, it has made things a lot easier for us. They are your children and you try to raise them, you do your very best to raise them the same way you will raise your own child, but there is a difference in the responsibilities.

**Dorothy Cozart**
Jamia really needs a lot of patience, because of her handicap, and that is something that she cannot help. She stumps, she screams, she hollers, that is the only way she can get your attention that way because she cannot talk with Miesha. If it was not for the daycare downstairs, our regular daycare outside the GrandFamilies House, I do not think we could have afford it.

**Janet Van Zandt**
The grandparents are better off financially for living here. They have the rent which is subsidized, and we are able to help with things like transportation and the on-site programs. They are very pleased that we have a van, we can take them to shopping trips, and we can pick up food, and we can do activities. We have a family advocate. We have had a lawyer come in and do legal rights of grandparents. We have had somebody come in and do nutrition programs, some health education programs.

**Dorothy Cozart**
They have like a food bank every Friday—you know that they give out food to all the residence of the building—and a lot of donation comes in.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
GrandFamilies House does not just benefit the grandparent.

**Janet Van Zandt**
The GrandFamilies House is important because it creates a kind of community and a validation that often they did not get before. Where it says, it is OK that you are living with your grandmother, and that your mother and father are not there.

**Shirley Washington**
The hard part of being a grandparent is that you know that your children miss their parents. The oldest child thought that I was separating them from the parent. I made a decision that I would let her go and stay with the parent for a while, and it did not work out too well. So she got her answers, and she knows where the best place is for her.

**Judith Roderick**
Grandparents end up with their grandchildren for many, many reasons. Most of it has to do with a lot of the things that go on in our society as a whole. There are issues around illnesses, death of a child, incarceration, drug problems—mental illness is another one. These issues are just part of society, and the grandparents that take on this role has agreed to do it, because they have a great deal of love for their grandchildren. You have taken a child that would have been in a foster home situation if you had not, and you have helped them along, because they are feeling a lot of loss. If you ask any grandparent doing it, there is not any other choice.

**Willi Cozart, Jr**
They are lovable, they are fun. They have fun and they just keep you, wanting to love them, and do the very best you can for them. So I mean, I have no problem with the burden of it. I ain’t got no complaints. I love them.

**Dorothy Cozart**
If the circumstances came up again the same way, I would take my grandchildren. I would raise them, because I love my grandchildren, and if I had to take any of the other ones, I would.

**Shirley Washington**
There was no choice there, no option there. I knew that what I had to do, I prayed over it.

Probably if I did not have them with me, I would not be up and about. I do not have time to just move around, and worry about what I do not have or any other predicament than I think that I am in.

**Janet Van Zandt**
It is this silent safety net, and the people in the community can come forward and rise to the occasion and step beyond their own personal needs, and take on these challenges and say, we will raise the kids. We will form a community, close in, and raise these kids ourselves.

***Mickey Roache***
All over the country, you are going to find grandparents of all kinds; they can be White, Black, Hispanic. There is a need to provide additional resources for these grandparents. It is a profound story, it is about courage, it is about caring, it is about unselfishness, and it is mostly about love of kids.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Today we have Crystal Holmes with us, our Internet expert from IBM. Grandparents and computers—what is on the Internet for us?

**Crystal Holmes**
That is a great question. There is quite a bit of information on the Internet. The site we are going to go to today is the American Association for Retired Persons. We actually can go to this site enter in a search word, on *grandparent*. They have quite a few documents, ranging from grandparents, going through life transitions and independent living, all the way to grandparents raising grandchildren. They even have support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren.

But you know, the Internet provides more than just information. It actually is a very robust communications tool. So grandparents can actually get on the Internet, sign up for a free email service, and they can communicate with their grandchildren, and it is really neat that the technology provides the ability to send digital photos. You can actually get a camera that you put on top of your computer, and if your grandchildren have the same technology. You can actually communicate live video across the street, across the country, or even across the world. It is a fascinating tool.

So I think grandparents will find it as a great thing to use.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Golly! It is just as if you are really furnishing a communication system between these two generations. The wonderful thing is that the grandchildren must be like, oh, my grandfather is joining me in my medium.

**Female Speaker:**
And Berry, our next Internet question comes from Karen in Phoenix, Arizona. Her question is: “My parents live over 2300 miles away from their first grandchild. We try to see them quite often, and they go to great lengths to see us anyway and anytime they can. My husband and I are very close to my parents, and we want our children to have the same bond. What can we do to see that this happens even across the miles?”

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Grandparents all over the country must be wondering how to keep in communication with their little families when they are not close to them. We have just heard some wonderful ways to use the Internet to keep communication between grandparents and grandchildren. I would add some other things, like use the telephone regularly, be sure to make some video tapes that grandchildren can look at from time to time, maybe even as a bed time story. Then I would add one other thing, be sure that you as a parent talk to your children about the grandparents. When I was a little girl, this went on, and they will pick up on identifying with you and the grandparent.

For more resources, visit us online at [www.onparenting.net](http://www.onparenting.net/)

**Announcer**
Brazelton on parenting, presented by the Parenting Institute at [pampers.com](http://www.pampers.com/)

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
One of the toughest issues parents face today is helping their kids cope with an important grandparent’s illness or death. I am joined today by Maria Trozzi, Director of the Good Grief Program at Boston Medical Center. How would you help prepare kids?

**Maria Trozzi**
Well, we certainly have to be willing to face this for ourselves if we are expected to help our children face it. I think there are lot of concerns that parents have, but there is an imbedded opportunity for helping kids develop resilience there, and I think that is worth talking about.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Resilience, so you mean this kind of facing a terrible situation can come out alright?

**Maria Trozzi**
Well, even better than that. Ultimately, children will face losses as they grow up. We will wish that not be true, but we know that it is inevitable, and how a child faces a grandparent's illness and death. We will prepare her for facing other losses in her life when she is an adult. Depending on how mom faces it, how dad faces it, think of the opportunities for expressing a negative feeling, sadness, and anger, and the feelings of being overwhelmed with illness. These are all models that children can draw upon, and I think what, children particularly need, young children, is a behavioral way of looking at it, that is, to talk about grandparents' behavior.

A lot of 70-year-old grandparents are very vital, and lead very active, complicated lives as well. And so when they begin to slow down for parents to be able to talk about the differences—Grandma used to be able to play tennis with you or read with you, and now she is sleeping a lot, or now she is in a hospital, and a lot of times children just do not know how to make sense of this.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Some parents deny and want to put it away themselves, so of course, they do not want to face it with their kids.

**Maria Trozzi**
That is right.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
What would you say to children of different ages, so you could prepare them for this?

**Maria Trozzi**
It really depends so much on the age of the child, as well as the relationship that she has with grandmother or grandfather. I think for a child under the age of three or four, to try to keep the child's routine as simple as possible, and consistent as possible, is always a good idea. And to be able to say that grandmother is very ill, is sick, perhaps, not the way you get sick when you have a cold or when you get a temperature, but in fact, has a disease. When we use language such as, we *lost* grandpa today. Grandpa is sleeping or he *passed* away or passed on, for a young child, it does not describe what happened, and it often leads them, at the very least, feel confused, and at the very most, actually feel terrified.

I remember shortly after my father died, I came downstairs in the morning and was getting breakfast. I was taking a gallon of milk out of the refrigerator door and it slipped out of my hand. As it did, the milk just spilled all over the table, and I started crying, *really* crying, and that is not my typical way of going, and they looked at me, and jumped up, and started to help, and within a few minutes we were settled at the kitchen table, and I said, you know, I am having a really hard morning. I am really missing papa, right now. I am feeling really sad and I can still make your lunch, I can still drive you to school. I can still carry on.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
And you remembered that right on.

**Maria Trozzi**
Absolutely, to be able to describe what you are feeling, so that they are not terrified, to say, this is what it is about, I am missing your papa, and I can still care for you. And why can I do that? Because I am an adult. And that is I think the message that we do face this overwhelming feelings, but we have the coping skills. We can really join our children. It is so wonderful.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Lots of parents would avoid that so easily, because they would not want to have to pass on their own grieving to their child.

**Maria Trozzi**
But they are really passing on their coping skills, and they are also acknowledging how much they loved that person, and is that not worth it?

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
You make it turn something terrible into something faceable, and something that can help children learn to cope with loss.

**Maria Trozzi**
That is great, that is what it is about it, is that not?

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Next, we talk to parents across the country.

Each year we travel all over America. Answer questions from thousands of parents. Here are some of them.

**Female Speaker**
Hi, I have a three-and-a-half month-old grandson.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Great!

**Female Speaker**
What kinds of things can I do to encourage his development?

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Encourage his development?

**Female Speaker**
Right. Like what games or toys at this age, like the music he should be listening to.

**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**
Oh, you want some advice? Do not push so hard. And just be a grandmother. Grandmothers and grandfathers are for relaxation, for being held in soft cotton wool, and being nurtured, being admired, anything they do is admirable, and just being there, and everything that comes along. So when he looks at you, look back.

There are some things you can't do. One is, ever go and looking a grandchild in the face, anytime you walk into the house and look at your grandchild on the face, you will get what you deserve, a screaming baby. That is so intrusive. So what I have learned to do with my grandchildren, partly because my daughters and daughters-in-law are very, very sensitive people. But anyway, I have learned to look just pass their children, and then the grandchildren look at me like, papa, you are not speaking to me? So then they start getting into a rhythm and I get into the same rhythm with them. And as soon as I am in the same rhythm, they begin to realize, and then we get closer, and then they will make some bid for my attention.

I usually pass the first bid. They will, papa, and I will try to ignore that ,and then *papa*. Yeah, hi! And then look away quickly, and just let them come to you. And it is like magic. They all just can't wait to tease you into a relationship with them.

Now at three-and-a-half months, I would think the same thing. When you pick him up, you look for cues to be sure it is alright with your daughter or your son-in-law or your daughter, and be sure it is OK with her, and wait until he makes a bid for you, and then go, "Hi!" And then when he makes another bid, "Hi!" And just get into this lovely interaction with him. The only thing that I think we as grandparents have to be constantly aware of is, how jealous we make our children.

Everything we do, hits them below the belt. So be sensitive to that. Then if I ever, ever tell what not and what to do, I ought to be shot through the head. So I think, just being a grandparent is such a big gift. I am a pediatrician because of my grandmother. She used to say, Berry, you are so good with babies. Whenever I hear that now, I see her face. Nothing like it.

For tapes and transcripts call 188-847-1220 or log on at [www.onparenting.net](http://www.onparenting.net/).

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**Dr. Thomas Berry Brazelton**

I have always thought that grandparents can show their grandkids the mountain tops. By that I mean, they can give a child the dreams of what is possible and the unconditional love to feel those dreams. I know my grandmother did. She is why I am a pediatrician today, and I will always be thankful to her. If you are a grandparent, do everything you can to keep in touch with your grandkids. If you are a parent, do everything you can to make your parents a part of their kids lives. The reason is simple: Your children need their grandparents.