



Celebrating grandparents and the extended family - a call to action

Grandparents Plus, the Grandparents Association and Family Rights Group believe that all children benefit from being part of an extended family. Family life in the UK is rich in variety and complex in its relationships. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, step-grandparents, god-parents and family friends may all contribute to the rich tapestry of family life which nurtures and protects a child. For example, three quarters of the UK population is part of a family of three or more generations, providing children with a strong sense of their culture and heritage. Grandparents often provide an important safety net for parents: 82% of children receive some care from their grandparents; nearly 5 million grandparents each spend the equivalent of three days a week caring for their grandchildren; and 1% have grandchildren living with them. Importantly, many of these grandparents and other family and friends are also in paid work and/or are caring for other family members, as well as having other interests and pursuits. However, an estimated 1 million grandchildren are denied contact with their grandparents as a result of adoption, divorce, separation or family feud.

Despite this huge and vital contribution to family and community life, local and national policies neither sufficiently recognise the diversity of families nor address the role of grandparents and other relatives in caring for children.

Grandparents Plus, the Grandparents Association and Family Rights Group call upon the UK government to develop policies and practice that recognise and support the wider family's role in caring for children. Parliamentary candidates are asked to support the following:

Awareness

1. Increase the profile and **awareness of the vital role that grandparents and the wider family play in families**, and especially in the emotional and cultural lives of children.
2. **Improve training** to increase social workers', lawyers' and other professionals' understanding and awareness of the importance of these family relationships to children, of helping the wider family to support vulnerable children and of the right to family life under the Human Rights Act 1998.

Vulnerable children

3. **Ensure policies and procedures are in place to implement the requirement under Section 23(6) of the Children Act 1989** to place children who are looked after by the local authority with family members or friends, before placing them with foster carers or adopters whom they do not know.

Challenging discrimination

4. **Challenge the ageist assumptions** made about grandparents' ability to care for their grandchildren.

Streamline procedures

5. **Review the requirement that grandparents have to apply for leave** to go to court for a residence or contact order – this can unnecessarily delay a key process for deciding whether a child should have continuing contact with family members.

Effective support for grandparents and the extended family

6. Ensure **better support for grandparents and the wider family when making choices** about the extent and type of care they are able to provide to children.
7. Ensure that grandparents and other family members who are caring for children have **access to appropriate information and support at all stages of a child's development**.
8. **Review the arrangements for providing effective support to family and friends who are raising a child – kinship carers**. Options include:
 - introducing a right to an assessment for support under s 17 Children Act 1989;
 - standardising local authority Section 17 payments to kinship carers through central guidance;
 - extending pension contributions to grandparents and other family members and friends who give up work to raise a child; and
 - introducing an additional element to tax credits for kinship carers to reflect the extra costs they face in raising a child.
9. **Extend the right to ask for flexible working to formal kinship carers** for the first two years that the child is living with them, or until the child reaches five years old – whichever ever is the later.
10. **Improve the availability of family group conferencing** to ensure that that the wider family are properly involved in decisions when a child enters the care system. Specifically family group conferencing should be available to all families who request it when their children are subject to state intervention.
11. **Support voluntary organisations to facilitate contact between grandparents and grandchildren** following divorce, separation and adoption through family mediation or family group conferences.
12. Ensure that all services for parents, such as **Sure Start and children's centres, are available and accessible to grandparents** and other family caring for children.
13. **Consult grandparents and the extended family** about what they need in order to provide family support in other areas such as housing, transport and the community.

Raising the issue in parliament

14. Successful candidates are urged to join **the All Party Group on Grandparents**.

For further information please contact:

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