

# If You Only Knew: A Tool for Grandparent Caregivers



**ZERO TO THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime

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One out of four preschool children is cared for by a grandparent while his parents work or go to school. There are many benefits when grandparents care for young children, but when more than one generation is involved in child care, communication can be a challenge. Even when relationships are warm, sharing the care can stir up strong feelings. Parents may worry that their child prefers to be with their grandparent, rather than with them. Parents may also worry that grandparents are better at parenting than they are. Grandparents may struggle to establish good boundaries. And, of course, conflicts may arise over child-rearing approaches.

## Uses and Goals of This Tool:

1. To provide a way to think about the topic of “sharing the care” across generations and provide guidance for dialogue about the shared tasks of caregiving.
2. To offer guidance and relief for families' conflicts.
3. To help grandparents and their adult children share what they appreciate about each other.
4. To offer caregiving adults the chance to share struggles and worries about their roles and the children in their care.



## Instructions:

1. In a group setting, discuss the joys and challenges of sharing care between two generations. Begin with the positives, perhaps mixing families and having strangers interview and introduce each other to the group. (This is a great place to share photos of grandkids.)
2. Point out that it's also common for families to experience conflict around caregiving. (See [Building a Child's Team](#) for information about possible areas of conflict.) Set ground rules for exploring this topic with love and respect. Explain that the tool being introduced can be used by grandparents with their adult children (and their spouses/partners) to discuss aspects of sharing the care they appreciate about one another, as well as struggles they might be experiencing.
3. Print and distribute the "If You Only Knew" Questionnaire. Ask participants to fill out the questionnaire as a way to explore viewpoints and share their experiences. Explain how the child's parent(s) would complete the second set of questions.
4. Ask participants to pair up and share their answers. Prompt them to imagine how their child's parent(s) might have answered in similar or different ways. If needed, provide guidance to help participants reflect on the final conversation starter, "One thing I can do to make our caregiving arrangement better:".
5. Discuss how this tool could be used to guide conversations between grandparents and their adult children. Remind grandparents of community resources available for mental health/family counseling or respite care, if needed.
6. Conclude the session by affirming the love and care that both grandparents and parents share for their children. By engaging in constructive, open conversations about caregiving relationships, the adults in the family are ensuring that children experience a loving, supportive model of a family.
7. Finally, feel free to adapt this tool or its approach to the needs of your community.



## Parent Worksheet

**This tool is designed to help parents and grandparents talk about sharing child care.**

If you are the parent, please complete the statements on this page. If you are the grandparent caring for your grandchild, please complete the questions on the following page.

When you're finished, share and discuss your answers with one another. Then complete the statements on the last page together.

Here is one thing you do for us that I am very grateful for:	If I were to ask you to make one change in how you care for _____, it would be:
When you care for _____, I love the way you:	What I love most about my child is:
Here is what is challenging for me about leaving my child(ren) in someone else's care—even yours!	Here is an idea for how we can support _____ in what s/he is learning and working on right now:
Here is one thing I worry about:	

## Grandparent Worksheet

**This tool is designed to help parents and grandparents talk about sharing child care.**

If you are the parent, please complete the statements on the previous page.  
If you are the grandparent caring for your grandchild, please complete the questions on this page.

When you're finished, share and discuss your answers with one another.  
Then complete the statements on the last page together.

Here is one reason I am so happy help to you and spend time with my grandchild(ren):	If I were to ask for one change in our arrangement for _____'s care, it would be:
There are so many things I love about the way you care for _____. Here is one example:	What I love most about my grandchild is:
It can be challenging at times for me to care for a growing child again. For example:	Here is an idea for how we can support _____ in what s/he is learning and working on right now:
Here is one thing I worry about:	

## Shared Answers

### One thing that I learned that I didn't know:

Parent:

Grandparent:

### One change I can make to our caregiving arrangement:

Parent:

Grandparent: