

Grandparent's Role in Formation of Children's Character

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When I look at my childhood I am very happy and proud about one thing. In my childhood and teenage years my grandfather was my best friend. I enjoyed going with him to Church every Sunday morning. I do not remember any ceremonies in the Church. But after worshipping in the Church I do remember my grandfather used to take me to a nearby hotel for a breakfast of 'putt' (a rice preparation) and cereal. Even today when I go home to Kerala my favourite breakfast is putt and cereal.

My grandfather had the habit of drinking toddy everyday late in the evening. If a servant is not free to go to the toddy shop, sometimes grandfather used to send me to bring toddy for him. With the money for the toddy he would also give me extra money to buy sweets. I was ready to do anything for my grandfather. I felt that my grandfather is a person who not only understood me best but he also showered unconditional love on me. I trusted grandfather fully.

I have inherited two things from my grandfather: discipline and self-control. Grandfather drank toddy everyday but he never went to a toddy shop. He would get only one bottle of toddy (less than a litre) and took it at home only in the late evening after finishing his work in the field for the day. He drank toddy with the snacks specially prepared by my grandmother.

I could specially appreciate the discipline and self control of my grandfather because in those days in our neighbourhood some elders were known for going to toddy shop and getting drunk. When they got drunk they gave bad words to the whole world on their way home and quarrelled with everyone in their families. They were known to transform their family into hell!

I was very proud of my grandfather. He was a respected person not only at home but also in our neighbourhood. I always basked in his love and care. So I was sure that he would stand by me always. I can prove it with a concrete example.

I have narrated the incident in detail in my book entitled "Memorable Experiences". When I was in the high school I dreamed about becoming a missionary to proclaim Jesus' love for the humanity. So when I passed the school final examinations I told my parents about my desire to go to Gujarat to become a missionary priest. But both my parents would not want to hearing anything about their eldest son going away from them... So I went to my grandfather. I was the favourite 'first' grandson of my grandfather.

One day my grandfather came to my house, about 200 meters away from grandfather's traditional mansion. "If Kochuvarghese wants to go to some mission in North India, let him go. If he does not like it there, let him come back. What is the problem?" my grandfather said as a matter of fact to my parents. When I said good bye to all on a fine day in June 1963 and left home, I found first time in my life tears in the eyes of my grandfather (Memorable Experience, pp.23-24).

My grandparents have a great role in my character formation. I believe that the grandparents can play a significant role in the formation of their grandchildren. In the place of joint-family of

yesteryears, today we have small families of the parents and one or two kids. In the past a mother always stayed at home taking full time care of her children. Today often both the father and the mother are working outside home. They are not at home to take care of their children. The grandparents too are not available in small families; but there could be a nurse at home or the child is put in a day care centre. In this situation children do not get to spend quality time with their grandparents and experience selfless love. Today young parents feel that their parents, that is, the grandparents of their children are too old fashioned to entrust their children to them. They feel that their parents are an obstacle to their ways of life and freedom. In my view such young parents are uncouth people without any understanding of life.

I grew up for 10-12 years in a joint family, So I received in full measure the tender love and care of my grandparents and other close relatives. Let me recount here from my observations the important role of grandparents in bringing up a child: First, the grandparents possess a mine of selfless love. They have experienced for decades the joys and sorrows as well as the ups and downs of life. Now they can distinguish easily the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. They understand the importance of nourishing lives.

The grandparents also appreciate their own contribution in the character formation and growth of their grandchildren. They understand that their life is fulfilled in giving and communicating love and receiving it. So they enjoy and shower love on their grandsons and granddaughters. Little children also recognize selfless love. They delight and grow in the selfless love of their grandparents. Grandchildren recognize and grow mature in the grandparents' selfless love along with the love and care of their parents.

Second, the grandparents are more patient and tolerant than the other people in little children's life. Even when grandchildren are mischievous and troublesome, the grandparents know to deal with them with tremendous patience and understanding. They become child-like with their grandchildren. Without considering the age-different grandparents are able to play with their grand children. They can patiently answer the endless questions of the grandchildren without ever losing their temper. They are patient and understanding even in provocative circumstances.

Third, the grandparents are prepared to give quality time and attention to their grandchildren. They spend time with their grandchildren, read to them stories, tell them interesting anecdotes and jokes. The grandparents have usually a mine of stories for children. Even if their stories get exhausted, they can get children story books and read the stories to grandchildren who are not yet able to read and enrich their little minds.

Fourth, the grandchildren imbibe the culture of family and religiosity from their grandparents. The children imbibe from the lives of their elders much more than the parents and other elders are willing to concede to them. Children have great power of observation and imitation. If the grandparents are performing religious rituals at home or going to the temple or mosque, the children assimilate such family and religious culture. The grandparents usually imparts to the grandchildren faith, devotion and spirituality of their religion.

Fifth, the children learn the basic principles and practices of interpersonal relationships even if these things are not formally taught.

The grandparents have the experiences of establishing and maintaining relationship with all sorts of people. They have seen and experienced lives in all their dimensions and diversities. They have with them a mine of experiences; so by living with them or being in contact with them the grandchildren in tender age learn and experience much from them.

Without knowing all these things or without understanding and discernment some parents keep their children away from their grandparents. The grandparents should have respectful and honoured place in their houses. If a grown up son cannot live in peace and love with his father or a daughter-in-law cannot get along with the mother-in-law, then the young couple may prefer to keep away their children from the influence of their grandparents and thus express their dislike for their parents.

I hope that as the young parents are away from their homes for attending to their jobs and business, grandparents usually take care the small children. Little children come in contact with their grandparents and grow up under their influence. This is in the interest of the grandchildren, their parents and the grandparents. In bringing up the little children the grandparents' role is irreplaceable. The parents or other relatives cannot play the role of the grandparents as they have unlimited patience and unconditional love for their grandchildren. (contact the author: ciss@satyam.net.in)

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