Extended Family
Introduction to the Roles of Extended Family

Parent’s involvement in a child’s life is of great importance, but the care provided by other individuals such as grandparents, aunts and uncles plays a major role in a child’s development.

The “extended family” by definition refers to a family group that consists of parents, children and other close relatives who often live in close proximity with each other (Peterson, 2009). The extended family can include friends, in-laws or other individuals whom parents share a bond and emotional closeness with (Friedman, 1998).

Support from members of the extended family has a significant impact on the healthy development of a child.

Extended family members can:
- Be great role models and influences for children
- Provide children with a sense of encouragement, security and stability
- Help children better understand the “roots” of their family
- Let children know that there are people outside the immediate family that love and care about them
- Provide advice or act as a support system for parents
- Help build on the sense of community for the child

The extended family can collaborate with parents to reinforce various aspects of positive discipline. This encourages children to be more independent and enables them to regulate their own behaviours. The goal of positive discipline is to guide children toward appropriate behaviours. The presence of different adult figures to serve as role models can help to emphasize these appropriate behaviours.
Quick Facts

In 2008, 43.7% of Canadians over the age of 15 reported having close contact with six or more relatives, up from 33.8% in 2003 (The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2010, p. 154).

Grandparents often become a family’s first support in times of crisis (financial support, care-giving, advice). Grandparents also act as fun playmates, role models, family historians, and mentors; and help to establish self-esteem and security for children (Cangrands, 2011).

Almost half of all parents asked in a national ZERO TO THREE parent survey (2010) said that they regularly turn to their mother or mother-in-law for information about child development and parenting.

More than half of parents (53%) say the way their parents raised them has a major influence on their approach to parenting (Zero To Three, 2010, p. 1).
### Open-Ended Questions

**How has your relationship with your parents influenced the way you parent?**

**Prompts:** Do you recall times when you chose to OR chose not to use a discipline strategy based on your own experience as a child?

**Discuss:** Use of grandparent’s advice and care giving techniques, incorporating aspects of discipline used by your parents, reinforcing similar values your parents used.

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**Share some of the benefits of having help from an extended family member (close friend, parents, in-laws, aunts, uncles etc.)?**

**Discuss:** Help with various household activities, advice about child care practices, being a role model to either you or your child, someone to talk to about being a parent, passage of family traditions.

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**Can you think of some challenges you’ve had with your child’s grandparents?**

**Discuss:** Issues, such as uninvited opinions or differences in opinions, regarding care giving, parenting, discipline and implementing family traditions.

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**What are some ways to manage conflict with parents regarding child discipline?**

**Discuss:** Open communication is essential - address the issue sooner than later. Let parents know that their help is appreciated but set clear limitations.
Words of Wisdom

“A family’s photograph album is generally about the extended family and, often, is all that remains of it.”
-Susan Sontag

“True happiness consists not in the multitude of friends, but in their worth and choice.”
-Samuel Johnston

“A family is a place where minds come in contact with one another.”
-Buddha

“An aunt is someone special to remember with warmth, think of with pride, and cherish with love.”
-Anonymous

“Only an aunt can give hugs like a mother, keep secrets like a sister and share love like a friend.”
-Anonymous

“A friend is one who walks in when others walk out.”
-Walter Winchell

“When a child is born, so are grandmothers.”
-Judith Levy
Tips for Supporting a Healthy Relationship
With Your Child’s Grandparents

When a child is born, not only do you become a parent, but you give your own parents a new role to play- the role of a grandparent. Children benefit from an extended circle of caring adults, thus contact with grandparents exposes children to other adult figures that can serve as role models for them (Mann, 2011).

Despite the many benefits associated with grandparents involvement in caring for their grandchildren, there are times when caring for the young can lead to conflict between parents and grandparents (Direnfeld, 2010). Grandparents may overstep their boundaries, and make parents feel that they are inadequate. The question becomes how do you deal with such conflicts?

Here are 5 tips that you can use to restore “peace” between you and your parents with regards to childrearing.

1. Communication, communication, communication!
As with most conflict, communication is vital to resolving the situation. It is important to discuss differences sooner than later. Let parents know that their help is appreciated, and that although you may disagree, the decision regarding your child’s well-being is yours to make.

2. Try to listen.
Conflict can escalate when the people involved do not listen to each other, thus it is important to stay calm, and actively listen to what your parents have to say.

3. Be precise.
Set clear roles and boundaries with your parents. Setting clear boundaries does not mean grandparents cannot have authority, but it is important for them to understand their authority is under your discretion.

4. Stay composed.
It is important to address the conflict and not the individual. Anger can cause us to lash out at the other person, instead of addressing the actual issue. Let your parents know how you feel, in addition to listening to how they feel.

5. Respect.
Avoid any verbal or non-verbal actions such as eye rolling which conveys disrespect for the other person. Although you do not agree with your parent’s opinion, you should respect that they are individuals who are entitled to have feelings different than yours.
Extended Family Word Search

Appreciate
Group
Barriers
Limitations
Bond
Listen
Communicate
Parents
Conflict
Role models
Distance
Support