

Key points

Houses of Parliament
exhibition 2024



Grandparents
United
for
Children

Why is legal, policy & practice change required?

Because this is a tortuous 'living bereavement' experienced by an estimated 2 million each of grandparents and grandchildren i.e.

- **an eighth of the UK's 45+ population and**
- **a sixth of the UK's under-16 populations respectively.**

The sudden, unexpected and profound loss of a close (and safe) family member impacts both grandchild and grandparent in the short, medium and long term.

The effects on the grandchild:

- Handles an isolated, unsupported grief and bereavement process by themselves, often manifested by:
 - Somatic symptoms of loss e.g. stomach aches, appetite loss
 - Behaviour changes e.g. withdrawal, acting-out, insomnia
 - Educational changes e.g. school reluctance, drop in performance or interest
- Feelings of self-blame, confusion, and embarrassment
- Anxiety and instability: 'who will I lose next?', 'what did I do wrong?'

The effects on the grandparent:

- Anxiety re their grandchild missing their presence in their life
- Confusion re their adult child's rejection, often with no explanation
- Shame and isolation e.g. 'how did it come to this?', 'I'm the only one'
- For older grandparents a worry that 'time is running out'
- Facing financial and emotional implications of court proceedings
- Harassment visits by police and legal proceedings following e.g. gifts and cards

The grandchild in particular has no safe space to talk about this living bereavement: they cannot risk their parents' anger and schools (who do not have living bereavement resources) are often silences or threatened with complaints.

Typologies

To help a better understanding a complex set of family dynamics, we have initially identified five typologies of estranged and alienated grandchildren and their grandparents. These are:

- a) grandchildren with a deceased parent with that grandparent lost as remaining parent 'moves on'
- b) grandchildren with separated parents introducing estrangement or alienation of (generally) the non-resident parent's parents
- c) grandchildren with parental mental health problems, or high family conflict levels
- d) grandchildren with a difficult parent/in-law-grandparent relationship or dispute
- e) grandchildren whose grandparent is subject to elder abuse by their parent e.g. a grandparent seeing their grandchild is conditional on lending parents money

In all cases except the first, the grandchild is weaponised in relation to the grandparent.

Currently in the UK:

Grandchildren do not have a legal right to maintain a relationship with their grandparents.

Grandparents are required to take their adult child to the Family Courts to maintain the relationship with their grandchildren.

Family mediation is not mandatory, meaning Family Courts and Cafcass are handling increasing numbers of grandchild-grandparent cases.

Parents and grandchild rights are often in effect conflated in the Family Courts, in effect meaning the child's rights are overridden to their parent's rights.

