

Playtime helps bind generations

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A new study has confirmed an old adage: a family that plays together stays together. Credit: Concordia University

A new study has confirmed an old adage: A family that plays together stays together. Researchers from Concordia University and Wilfrid Laurier University examined the ways grandparents can maintain close ties with their adult grandchildren. True to the old maxim, recreation emerged as the glue sealing intergenerational bonds.

"Leisure is vital in the formation of bonds that last from generation to generation," says lead author Shannon Hebblethwaite, a professor in Concordia University's Department of Applied Human Sciences.

"Shared [leisure time](#) allows [grandchildren](#) and their [grandparents](#) to establish common interests that, in turn, enable them to develop strong intergenerational relationships."

Published in [Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies](#), the study builds on previous research that found healthy intergenerational connections help grandparents age better and feel more positively about life. "The study of intergenerational bonds in adult grandchildren is relatively new," says Hebblethwaite. "Little attention has been paid to this relationship, yet grandparenting will become increasingly relevant as North America's population ages."

This new study is among the first to examine a cohort of grandchildren and their grandparents. "Most studies look into parenting, children or seniors. Few have examined how leisure contributes to the bonds between adult grandchildren and grandparents in the same family."

Gardening with grandma

Sixteen retired or semiretired grandparents, aged 65 to 89, took part in the investigation as well as 14 grandchildren aged 18 to 24. Occasions that typically brought generations together included vacations, holiday celebrations, cooking, shopping and gardening.

Grandparents often use such get-togethers as opportunities to teach, mentor and pass on legacies. "They share family histories, personal experiences and life lessons," says Hebblethwaite. "They pass on family values, traditions and stressed the importance of family cohesion."

Although finding common interests between generations can pose a challenge – i.e. should Katy Perry or Elvis Presley be the soundtrack for a road trip? – participants stressed how joint activities allowed them to learn from each other. "One young man recalled his initial resistance to baking pies with his grandmother, but he ended up being a great chef," observes Hebblethwaite.

Exchanging with youth can be a catalyst for discovery among seniors as

well. "Some grandparents learned about email, video-conferencing or technology through their grandchildren to stay connected with them," she says. "Sharing of knowledge during such leisure pursuits is what allows grandparents and grandchildren to develop strong bonds."

Forging strong ties with the matriarch or patriarch of a clan is beneficial for grandchildren, too, and can sharpen their sense of empathy, says Hebblethwaite. "After being doted on as kids, adult grandchildren have an opportunity to shift that dynamic and give back to their grandparents."

More information: "Expressions of Generativity Through Family Leisure: Experiences of Grandparents and Adult Grandchildren," [published](#) in *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, was authored by Shannon Hebblethwaite of Concordia University and Joan Norris of Wilfrid Laurier University.

Provided by Concordia University

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