



Webinar Discussion Guide

Navigating the Emotional Rollercoaster of Long-Distance Grandparenting

By Dr. Kerry Byrne
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Grief in grandparenting from a distance is not just about missing moments, but about longing for a closeness that distance makes harder to reach — a quiet ache for the bond you know could be stronger, if only the miles were fewer. Yet, in this ache, there is also love that stretches across the distance, creativity that finds new ways to connect, and hope that every moment shared, no matter how far apart, brings you closer.

— Kerry Byrne, PhD, Founder, The Long Distance Grandparent

Purpose

This guide supports discussion of the Jewish Grandparents Network webinar, *The Emotional Rollercoaster of Grandparenting from a Distance*, led by Dr. Kerry Byrne on June 5, 2025. You can use the ideas to reflect on the materials presented in the webinar to help you process and gently begin to cope with the emotions you are experiencing as a grandparent who lives far from your grandchildren.

Grandparent Groups, other grandparent social meet-ups, and program facilitators can view parts of the webinar recording <https://jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org/video-library/> together, then use the prompts below for participants to share their own experiences and thoughts.

These feelings — sadness, longing, even resentment — are valid and real. This is more than about missing your grandchildren; it's about mourning the loss of proximity, everyday moments together, and a vision of grandparenting you may have held for years.

Whether your grandchildren have always lived far away or recently moved, the emotional impact can be significant. The goal is not to fix the tough emotions, but to walk alongside them, while nurturing loving, meaningful relationships with your grandchildren.

Key Takeaways

- **You're not imagining it. This is hard.** Long-distance grandparenting often brings a sense of anticipatory grief (grieving the moments you know you will miss in the future), ambiguous loss (children and grandchildren are alive but physically absent; they are present in your heart, but not in your daily life), and disenfranchised grief (grief that goes unrecognized by others). There are many emotions involved — and the first step is recognizing them yourself. When others, such as trusted friends, professionals, or supportive communities, acknowledge your experience, it can create space for support, understanding and healing.
- **You are allowed to feel everything.** There are no rules about the emotions you experience. It's okay to feel pride *and* resentment. Gratitude *and* heartbreak. These conflicting emotions don't cancel each other out — they coexist. That's emotional ambivalence, and it's a normal part of this experience.
- **You can love from a distance — with intention.** Though it's not what you envisioned, your role as a grandparent still matters. Relationships can be nurtured across time zones and screens. They may look different, but they can still be deep and lasting. For tips on staying connected from far away, view Dr. Kerry Byrne's session on "[At a Distance: Practical and Meaningful Ways to Build Relationships with Your Grandchildren Who Live Far Away](#)," recorded December 5, 2023.
- **Your grandchildren experience tough emotions too.** Distance and goodbyes are hard for children, especially younger ones. Simple rituals (for example, creating a secret hello and goodbye handshake, a postcard after each visit with a photo of you together), regular and predictable contact (for example, video calls, handwritten letters, texts), and acknowledging their feelings can help them feel emotionally secure and connected to you.

Tips and Coping Strategies

Name the emotion(s). Give yourself permission to say: "*This is grief. This is sadness.*" It helps validate your emotions and is the first step toward healing.

Practice "both/and" thinking. This strategy can help you hold two truths at once, so you don't get stuck in the negative one:

- *"I miss everyday moments AND I'm finding new ways to stay connected."*
- *"I'm sad we're apart AND I can still be a present and loving grandparent."*

Plan for emotional surges. Emotions often intensify after visits or goodbyes. Think ahead and schedule comforting and fulfilling activities post-visit. For example, have lunch with a trusted friend, have a night out at the theatre with your partner, or go on a hike to connect with nature. The goal is to gently ease the transition. This looks different for everyone. Choose something that you know helps you regulate emotions and feel grounded, comforted, or restored.

Help your grandchildren process emotions — especially grief. With the help of your adult children (your grandchildren's parents), and depending on the age of your grandchildren, talk about what they might be feeling.

- Name the emotion: *"It's hard to say goodbye, isn't it? For me too."*
- Use rituals, for example, a goodbye song or a hug you make up together.
- Create a follow-up plan together, for example, *"Let's pick a day for our next video call"* or *"Watch the mail next week because I am going to send a little surprise"*.

Use reflective practices. These tools can help you process emotions and find meaning in your experience by encouraging self-compassion and inviting curiosity about how you're feeling.

- Journal your emotions without judgment.
- Use affirmations like:
 - *"Distance is hard, but my love travels as far as it needs to."*
 - *"I can grow around this grief and still be the grandparent my grandchild needs."*

Discussion Questions

1. What emotions have surprised you most about grandparenting from a distance?
2. What feelings have you kept quiet or felt weren't understood? Who could you safely share them with?
3. What coping strategies have you tried so far? What's something new you might explore?
4. How can you begin to shift your focus from what you *can't* do to what you *can* do as a long-distance grandparent?
5. What's one small step you can take this week to nurture your relationship with your grandchild(ren)?

Recommended Resources

[Coping with the Grief of Grandparenting From a Distance: A Resource Guide, by Kerry Byrne, PhD, Founder, The Long Distance Grandparent](#)

[Simple Rituals to Help Ease the Goodbyes with Long-Distance Grandchildren](#)

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