



Webinar Discussion Guide

When Grandparents Get Canceled (And What to Do About It)

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Purpose

This guide supports discussion of the Jewish Grandparents Network webinar “When Grandparents Get Canceled (And What to Do About It)” led by Rachel Haack, MA, MFTI. Grandparent groups, discussion circles, and program facilitators may use the following prompts and reflections to help grandparents explore the emotional complexity of family estrangement and identify both realistic strategies and emotional frameworks for navigating grief, disappointment, and healing.

Key Takeaways

- **Estrangement is complex.** Family estrangement is rarely the result of one event or person. It is often shaped by intergenerational stress, emotional cutoff, life transitions, and unexamined cultural narratives that emphasize self-protection over repair.
- **The cultural context matters.** In Western societies, values like independence and autonomy are often emphasized over loyalty, duty, and family responsibility. These cultural messages can reinforce the decision to cut off family members, often without critical reflection.
- **Know your goal.** Grandparents should clarify what they truly want —reconciliation, access to grandchildren, emotional validation — and understand that these goals may require different strategies and cannot always coexist.
- **Reconciliation starts with perspective-taking.** One of the most effective (and difficult) steps toward reconciliation is learning to understand the adult child's perspective well enough that they would say, “Yes, that's how I feel.” This empathy opens the door to new relational possibilities.

- **Ambiguous loss is real.** Long-term estrangement can bring grief that is as painful as death, but without public support or closure. This kind of loss requires intentional mourning and support from others who understand.
- **Keep living.** Whether or not reconciliation happens, grandparents can still build lives filled with meaning, purpose, and joy. *The future is not canceled.*

Tips and Strategies for Coping and Connection

- **Practice strategic love.** Determine what matters most and let that guide your actions. Sometimes, preserving access to grandchildren means overlooking slights or unfairness.
- **Write a letter of amends.** Based on Dr. Joshua Coleman's work, this is not a confession, but a way of acknowledging your adult child's emotional experience without defensiveness.
- **Stay at the table.** Don't be the first to quit difficult conversations. If therapy is offered, say yes. If the door cracks open, step through gently.
- **Join a support network.** Connect with other grandparents in similar situations. Grief is easier to bear when witnessed and shared.
- **Reframe the narrative.** Your story isn't over. Even in estrangement, growth and meaning are possible.

Discussion Questions

1. What was your dream about being a grandparent? How has estrangement impacted that dream?
2. What messages have you absorbed from culture or media about what it means to be "cut off" or "toxic"? How have those shaped your understanding of your situation?
3. When you reflect on your adult child's perspective, what do you think they might say about your relationship? Can you identify a "kernel of truth" in their story?
4. Have you ever tried writing (or considered writing) a letter of amends? What might you want to express, and what might you need to let go of?
5. How have you coped with ambiguous loss? What has helped you hold the pain and continue to build your life?
6. What relationships in your life today are calling for your energy, time, and care?
7. Who do you want to be in this chapter of your story — regardless of what your adult child chooses?

Recommended Resources

Books

[*Rules of Estrangement*](#) by Dr. Joshua Coleman

[*When Parents Hurt*](#) by Dr. Joshua Coleman

Articles & Online Writers

Steven Howard's Substack on Estrangement

Forget Them Kids by Vivian King (also published under the title **F*ck Them Kids**)

Dr. Pauline Boss on Ambiguous Loss