

# Findings from the National Study of Jewish Grandparents

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

To deepen our understanding of today's Jewish American grandparents and their relationship with their children and grandchildren, the Jewish Grandparents Network commissioned a study designed to obtain projectable quantitative data. The study included grandparents 55-80 years of age, who self-identify as Jewish, reside primarily in the United States, and have at least one grandchild under age 18 who lives in the U.S. As part of the study, the survey program selected one grandchild at random and that relationship was the focus of many of the survey questions.

1,017 respondents for the nationally representative sample were sourced through a leading national survey sample provider. Additionally, a supplemental outreach sample of 6,785 grandparents was recruited via 17 Jewish partner organizations, social media, and personal referrals. The report is based on the nationally representative sample data.

### Who Are Today's Jewish Grandparents?

- Nearly two-thirds (63%) fall between the ages of 65-74. The vast majority (90%) currently identify with a major denomination (Reform-52%, Conservative-31%, or Orthodox-5%).
- Over three-quarters (79%) of grandparents are currently married or living with a partner, although they may have previously been divorced or widowed. Among those with a spouse/partner, 70% say that they share the responsibilities of grandparenting equally with their spouse/partner.
- Over half of grandparents (54%) have an annual household income of \$100,000 or more. 2/3's of the grandparents studied are retired. Of the remainder, 20% work full-time, and 11% work part-time.

### Jewish Grandparents and Their Families

- More than half (57%) of Jewish grandparents have two adult children. The typical grandparent has one or two grandchildren under the age of 18, although some have larger families.
- Half of grandparents (53%) report that one of their grandchild's parents (i.e., the spouse/partner of the parent who is their son or daughter) does not identify as Jewish. In these interfaith households, 38% of the grandchildren are being raised with Judaism (15% Jewish only and 23% Jewish and another faith) and 20% are being raised solely in another faith or tradition.
- Half of grandparents (47%) live an hour or less by car, bus, or train from their grandchildren. 39% live more than five hours away.
- Approximately one-third of grandparents provide daytime childcare (32%), overnight childcare or sleepovers (34%), or provide transportation duties (28%) on a scheduled or as-needed basis.

### Attitudes and Practices

- Grandparents report generally very positive attitudes toward grandparenting. However, nearly a third report that their ideas about child-rearing conflict with those of their adult children, and one-in-ten find grandparenting to be a generally stressful experience.
- Three-out-of-four grandparents strongly or somewhat agree that "Being Jewish is an important part of my life." For the remainder, Judaism is an element of their self-definition but not an essential part of who they are.
- A strong majority of grandparents are interested in passing on some Jewish traditions and values to their grandchild. A minority (38%) believe it is important for their grandchild to marry a Jewish partner.
- Grandparents tend to be more engaged with their grandchildren in secular and everyday activities than in Jewish ones.
- In the past year, the majority of grandparents celebrated a family birthday with their grandchild or did 'stuff' together at home (e.g., crafts, games, baking, gardening). In contrast, a quarter attended synagogue services or activities with their grandchild during the same period.
- The majority of grandparents said they celebrated Hanukkah with their grandchild in the past three years - on par with national holiday celebrations, like Thanksgiving. Far fewer participated in Passover or High Holiday activities with their grandchild during that same period.
- Less than half of grandparents are currently engaged in key elements of organized Jewish life. Two-in-five grandparents belong to or participate in a synagogue/temple/minyan and far fewer are involved in a local or national Jewish organization or JCC. While the pattern is similar among their adult children, they affiliate at slightly lower levels.

## Understanding Different Grandparent-Grandchild Relationships

In analyzing the data, it was important to go beyond looking at the Jewish grandparent population as a whole to identify and understand the different types of grandparent-grandchild relationships that exist within this population. Five grandparent groups (or segments) were identified through multivariate segmentation of the attitudinal data:

- **Joyful Grandparents** (20% of the nationally representative sample): love being grandparents and being part of a multigenerational family. They feel it is very important to transmit Jewish values and beliefs, which they model for their grandchildren.
- **Faithful Grandparents** (16%): want their grandchildren to have a strong connection to Judaism and to marry Jews. They are deeply committed grandparents, who are involved on a regular basis with their grandchildren and intentionally model Jewish behaviors for them.
- **Secular Grandparents** (23%): are genuinely involved and confident grandparents who take great pleasure in their role. They enjoy being part of a multi-generational family but don't model Jewish faith or practice for their grandchildren.
- **Wistful Grandparents** (20%): want to be more involved with their grandchildren, but family dynamics or emotional distance get in the way. Their ideas about child-rearing differ from those of their adult children and they don't feel valued as grandparents.
- **Detached Grandparents** (21%): are neither Jewishly engaged themselves nor interested in passing on Jewish practices to their grandkids. While most report satisfying family relationships overall, their level of interaction with their grandchildren is more modest than other groups (except Wistful Grandparents).

## Understanding and Engaging the Different Grandparenting Groups

- Among the grandparenting groups, only Joyful and Faithful Grandparents celebrate Shabbat with their grandchild or attend services and programs at synagogue with them in significant numbers.
- Teaching their grandchild to lead a moral and ethical life and sharing family stories with them are of high importance to grandparents across all of the groups.
- In contrast, grandparent interest in passing on specifically Jewish concepts and practices to their grandchild – including cultural arts and food – is largely limited to Joyful and Faithful Grandparents. However, the data suggest that Secular and Wistful Grandparents may have some interest in sharing Jewish customs, traditions, and stories with them.
- Secular Grandparents might be receptive to learning how to make everyday activities and secular celebrations more meaningful by connecting those experiences to relevant Jewish content. They would be much more attracted to programming in spaces that are not overtly Jewish, as well as home-based experiences.
- Wistful Grandparents are most in need of tools and opportunities to assist them with the challenges of complex family dynamics, as well as effective ways to connect with grandchildren from afar.
- Detached Grandparents should be acknowledged for their caretaker role although it is clear that they are not seeking further engagement in Jewish life.

The five grandparenting groups identified in the study provide valuable insights into how best to address their needs and interests and involve them in Jewish life:

- Joyful and Faithful Grandparents will be the most interested in creative new ways to transmit Jewish traditions and practices. They will be the most open to participating in and creating programming in synagogues, JCCs and other Jewish portals, in addition to home-based experiences.



## Conclusions

- Jewish Boomers are embracing grandparenting with passion although a significant minority report multi-generational challenges that impact their relationships with their children and grandchildren.
- Like grandparents everywhere, many Jewish grandparents are helping their families to function in today's complicated world. They provide childcare, transportation, overnight care and so much more.
- Families today often navigate the complexities of multi-faith and multicultural family life. The challenges Jewish grandparents face in this radically changed family landscape have placed them on the front lines of family engagement.
- Communities and organizations would be best served by engaging today's Jewish grandparents as true stakeholders with a full "seat at the table" as they seek to better understand their interests and needs and to chart a path forward.