



**Jewish Grandparenting Today:
A Report on the Findings from the
National Study of Jewish Grandparents**

October 2019

Introduction

Who are today's Jewish American grandparents and what role do they play in the lives of their grandchildren? Past studies provide important insights about the impact of grandparents on Jewish youth and young adults.

In their 2014 study of 1,150 Jewish college students, researchers Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar discovered that grandchildren accompanied by grandparents to synagogue and other Jewish settings were most likely to feel strong attachments to the Jewish people and to Israel.¹ The 2015 report on children of intermarriage by The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies found that: "For children of intermarriage, being 'very close' to Jewish grandparents was an important predictor of a variety of [positive] Jewish attitudes and behaviors."² Jack Wertheimer, in his 2016 article in *Mosaic Magazine*, speaks of grandparents as "American Jewry's great untapped resource."³

Outside of the Jewish context, a 2017 longitudinal study conducted at Boston College revealed that: "young adults

with a sustained grandparent relationship experience lower levels of depression."⁴ Arthur Kornhaber, who many consider the key founder of the grandparent movement in the U.S., states in the *The Vital Connection* that the grandparent-grandchild relationship is unique and essential to both parties, and "the bond between grandparents and grandchildren is second in emotional power and influence only to the relationship between children and parents."⁵ In her book, *The Spiritual Child*, Lisa Miller writes: "Very often a grandparent becomes this special spiritual partner...who sits and listens to a child's questions, welcomes a child's feelings, and has the long deep talks at the kitchen table."⁶ However, while we have been offered evidence of the crucial roles that grandparents play in supporting their families, advancing Jewish identity, and promoting their grandchildren's emotional well-being, no prior study has focused exclusively on the demographics, attitudes, practices and aspirations of Jewish grandparents in the United States.

About The Study

To deepen our understanding of today's Jewish American grandparents and "the vital connection" between them and their grandchildren, the Jewish Grandparents Network commissioned a landmark research study, designed to obtain projectable quantitative data. Respondents were invited to participate in the 20-minute online survey, which was conducted by Impact:NPO, between November 5–December 4, 2018.

The sample 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. After collecting demographic information about the grandparent and all of their grandchildren, the study focused on the relationship between a grandparent and a specific grandchild, from the grandparent's perspective.

Many grandparents have multiple grandchildren and each of those relationships is unique. However, for this study, it was not practical to collect in-depth data about every relationship. Instead, the survey program selected one grandchild at random and that relationship was the focus of most of the survey questions. These randomly selected grandparent-grandchild relationships provide a statistically reliable picture of the diverse range of relationships across the U.S. Jewish grandparent population.

In order to obtain data that would accurately reflect the Jewish grandparent population of the United States, 1,017 respondents were sourced through a leading national provider of survey samples. The report focuses on the findings from this nationally representative sample.

Additionally, to help further define and address constituent needs of specific populations, a supplemental (outreach) sample of 6,785 grandparents was recruited via 17 Jewish partner organizations (listed at the end of this report), social media, and personal referrals. The extraordinary level of participation by this outreach sample yielded the first significant study finding. Through their enthusiastic response, these Jewish grandparents demonstrated their strong desire and readiness to share their thoughts and experiences.

Much of the data from the study has not yet been fully analyzed. In the months to come, the Jewish Grandparents Network will publish additional findings and analyses. In the meantime, we invite you to use this document to begin important conversations among Jewish communal and organizational leaders; among academics and educators and, perhaps of greatest importance, *among* Jewish grandparents and *between* grandparents and the Jewish organizations and communities who seek to engage them.

¹ Keysar, A. and Kosmin, B. (2014), *Demographic Survey of American Jewish College Students*, Hartford, Connecticut, Trinity College, <https://www.trincoll.edu/Academics/centers/isscc/Documents/HighlightJewishCollegeStudentSurvey.pdf>

² Brandeis University, Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, (2015) *Millennial Children of Intermarriage: Touchpoints and Trajectories of Jewish Engagement*, <https://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/pdfs/intermarriage/MillennialChildrenIntermarriage1.pdf>

³ Wertheimer, (2016) Jack, *American Jewry's Great Untapped Resource: Grandparents*, *Mosaic Magazine*, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/religion-holidays/2016/01/american-jewrys-great-untapped-resource-grandparents>

⁴ Ruiz, S. A and Silverstein, M., (2017), *Relationships with Grandparents and the Emotional Well-Being of Late Adolescent and Young Adult Grandchildren*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229804812_Relationships_with_Grandparents_and_the_Emotional_Well-Being_of_Late_Adolescent_and_Young_Adult_Grandchildren

⁵ Kornhaber, A. and Woodward, K., (1985) *Grandparents/Grandchildren: The Vital Connection*, New Jersey, Transaction Books

⁶ Miller, Lisa, (2015), *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*, New York, St. Martin's Press

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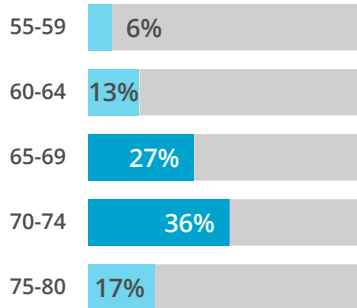


Who Are Today's Jewish Grandparents?

The sample 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.

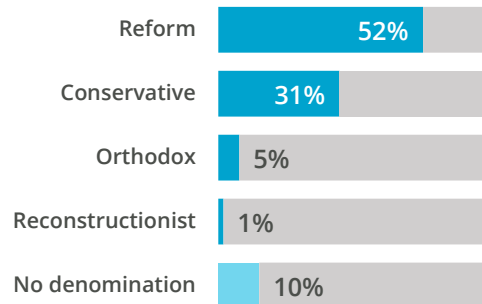
AGE

Nearly **two-thirds (63%)** fall between the **ages of 65-74**.



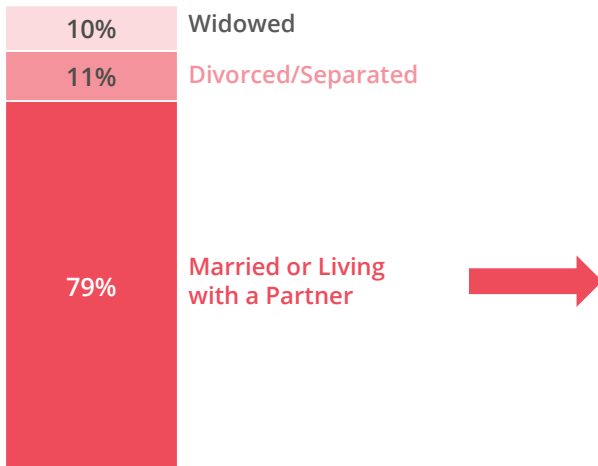
DENOMINATION

All self-identify as Jewish and the vast **majority (90%)** currently **identify with a major denomination** (most often Reform).



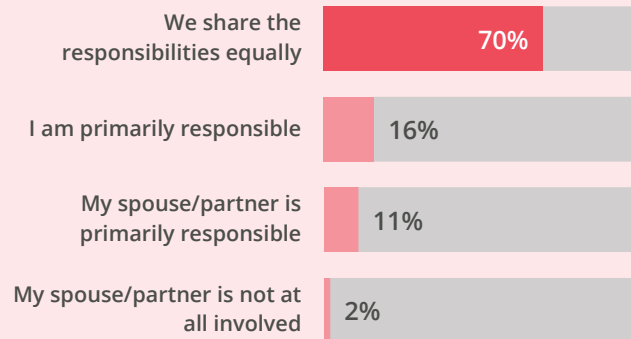
MARITAL STATUS

Over three-quarters (79%) of grandparents are **currently married** or living with a partner, although they may have previously been divorced or widowed.



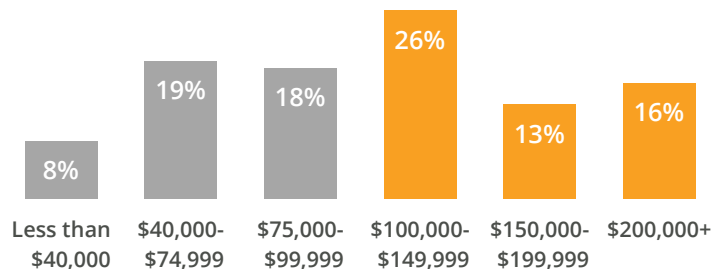
GRANDPARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES

Among those grandparents with a partner, the **majority (70%)** say that **they share the responsibilities** of grandparenting equally with their spouse/partner while 2% are not at all involved. This suggests that grandparenting substantively engages most men and women.



HOUSEHOLD INCOME BEFORE TAXES (PER YEAR)

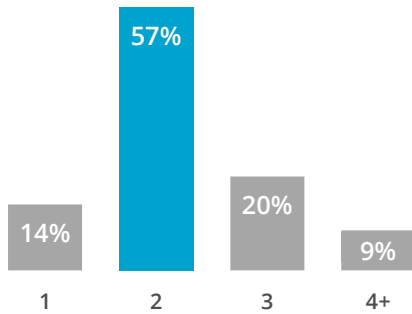
Over half of grandparents (54%) have an annual household **income of \$100,000 or more**. Two thirds of the grandparents studied are retired. Of the remainder, 20% work full-time and 11% work part-time.



Jewish Grandparents and Their Families

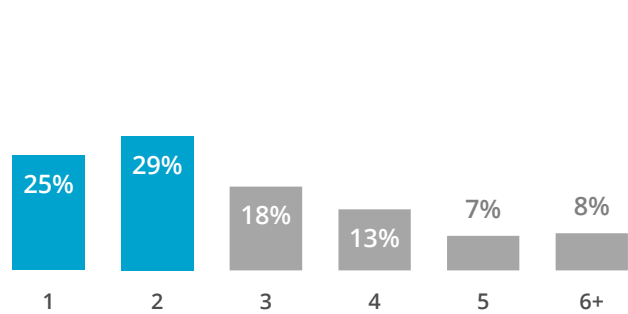
More than half (57%) of Jewish grandparents have two adult children.

NUMBER OF ADULT CHILDREN



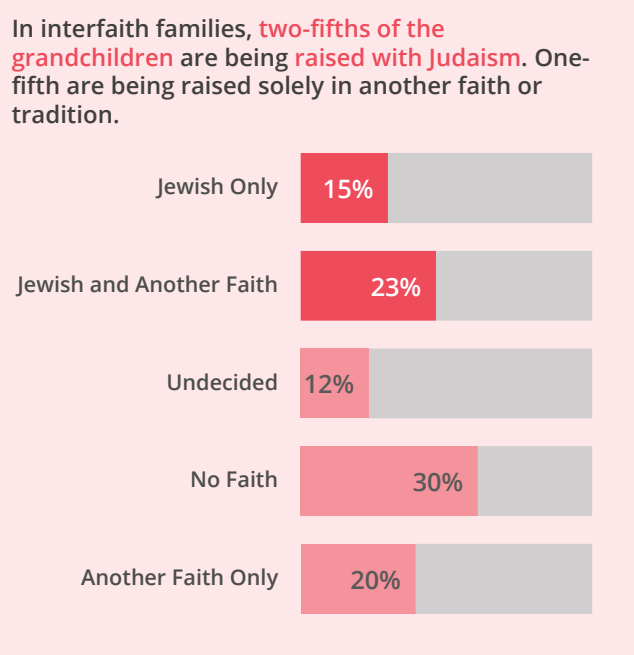
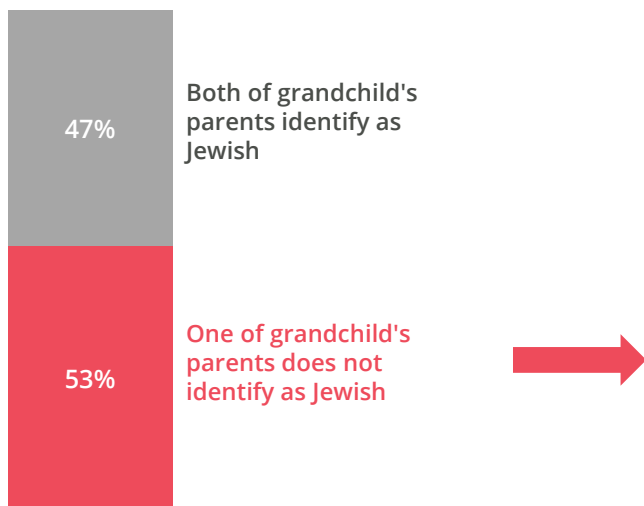
The typical Jewish grandparent has one or two grandchildren under the age of 18, although some have larger families.

NUMBER OF GRANDCHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 18



FAITH/TRADITION IN WHICH GRANDCHILD IS BEING RAISED IN INTERFAITH FAMILIES

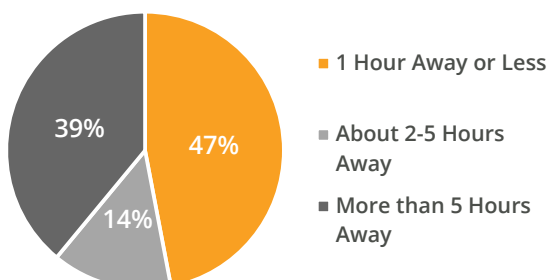
Half of grandparents (53%) report that one of their grandchild's parents (i.e., the spouse/partner of the parent who is their son or daughter) does not identify as Jewish.



Geographical distance between grandparents and their grandchildren can play an important role in the grandparent-grandchild relationship. While these data are based solely on the random grandchild, they provide an important national picture about proximity and involvement in caretaking.

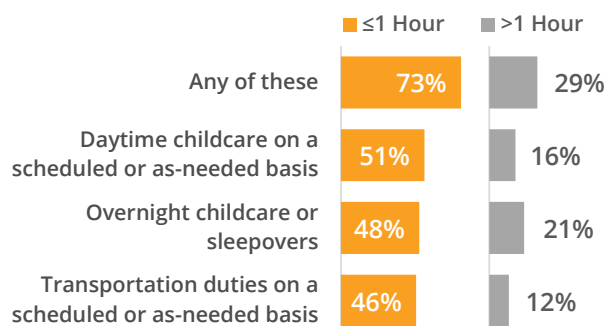
DISTANCE FROM GRANDCHILD (BY CAR/BUS/TRAIN)

Almost half of grandparents live an hour away or less from their grandchild.



PAST-YEAR CARETAKING

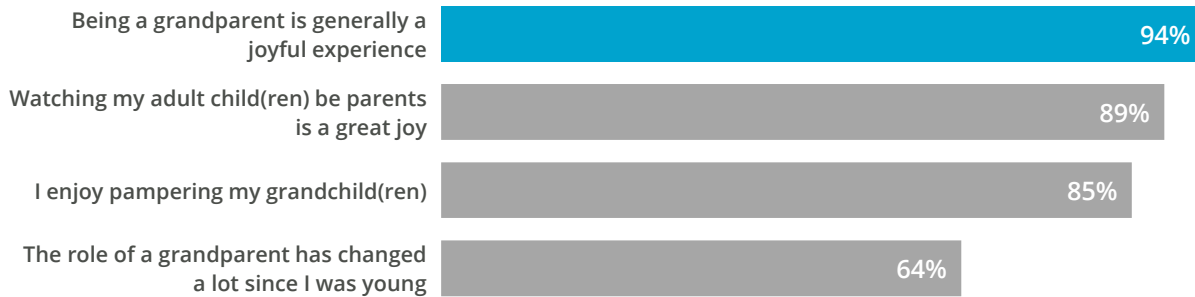
Grandparent caretaking is more prevalent among grandparents who live close-by (an hour away or less).



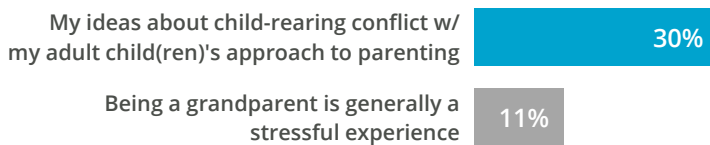
Attitudes and Practices

ATTITUDES TOWARD GRANDPARENTING (% AGREE STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT)

The generally **very positive attitudes of grandparents** toward their grandparenting experience should not come as a surprise. This generation enthusiastically embraces grandparenthood and gleefully claims their grandparent names. Bubbe, Zayde, Safta and Saba exchange grandchild pictures and stories with Glemma, Chief, Mimz and Pops.

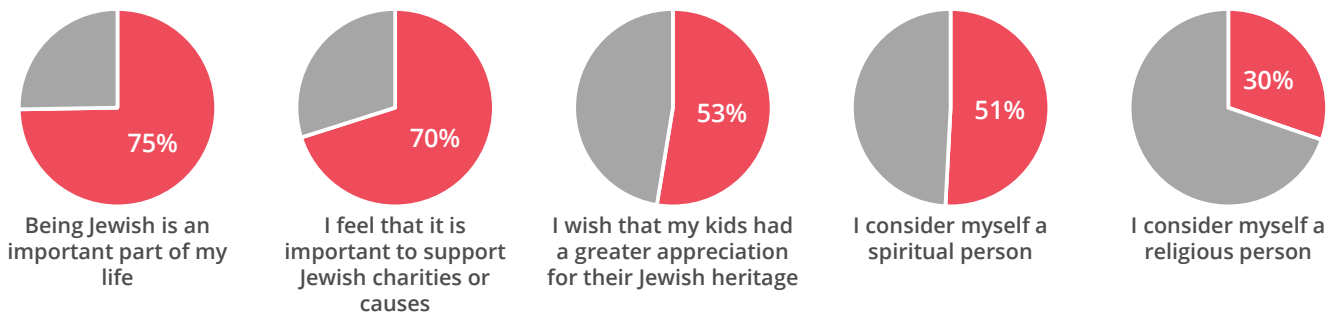


That said, for some, the grandparenting experience poses significant challenges. **Nearly a third** report that their **ideas about child-rearing conflict with those of their adult children**, and one-in-ten find grandparenting to be a generally stressful experience.



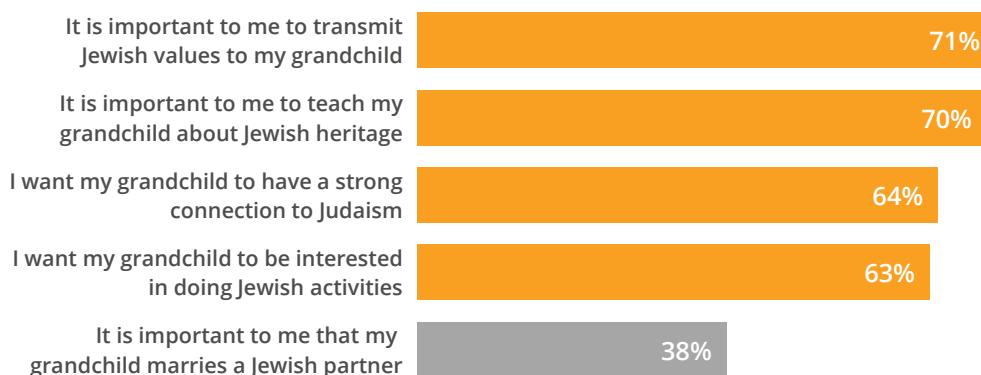
ATTITUDES TOWARD JEWISH IDENTITY (% AGREE STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT)

For **three-out-of-four grandparents, Judaism is a strong, active part of their identity**. For the remainder, Judaism is an element of their self-definition but not an essential part of who they are.



JEWISH ASPIRATIONS FOR GRANDCHILD (% AGREE STRONGLY OR SOMEWHAT)

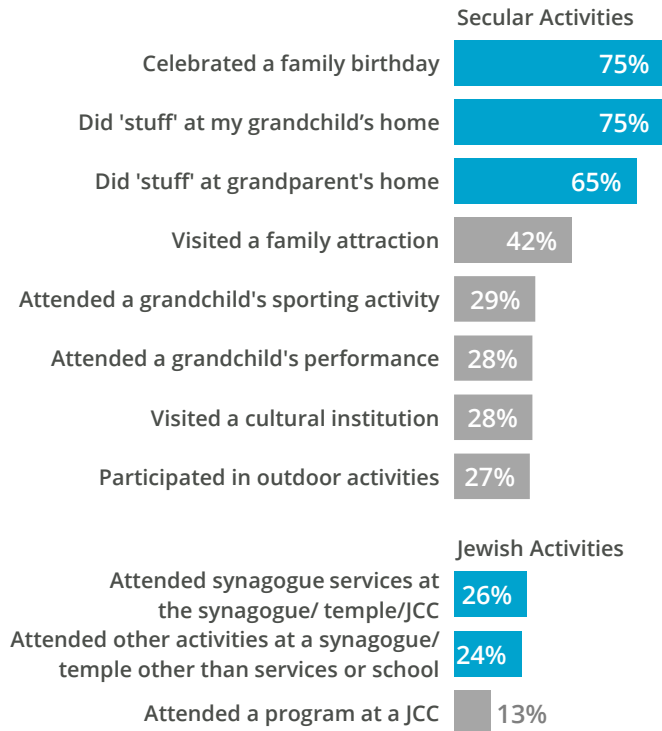
Given that most grandparents view Judaism as an important part of their lives, it is not surprising that a **strong majority are interested in passing on some Jewish traditions and values** to their grandchild. In contrast, a minority believe it is important for their grandchild to marry a Jewish partner.



ACTIVITIES DONE WITH GRANDCHILD – PAST YEAR

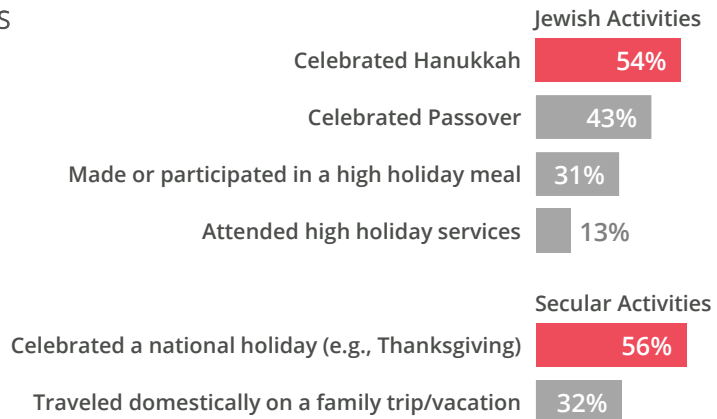
Looking at the activities that grandparents do together with their grandchild provides a window into grandparent priorities and values and, potentially, important opportunities for Jewish communities and organizations to consider. The findings show that grandparents tend to be more engaged with their 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, **only a quarter attended services or activities at synagogue** with their grandchild in the past year and less than one-in-six attended a program together at a JCC.



ACTIVITIES DONE WITH GRANDCHILD – PAST 3 YEARS

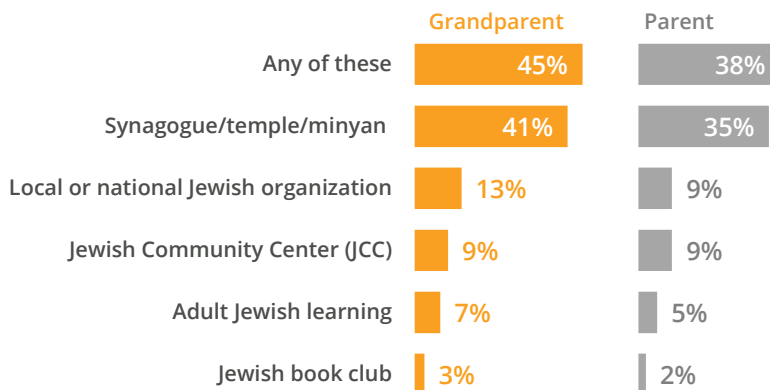
The majority of grandparents said they celebrated **Hanukkah** with their grandchild at least once in the past three years — on par with national holiday celebrations, like **Thanksgiving**. Far fewer said they participated in Passover or high holiday activities with their grandchild, or traveled domestically with them during that same period.



CURRENT PARTICIPATION OR MEMBERSHIP

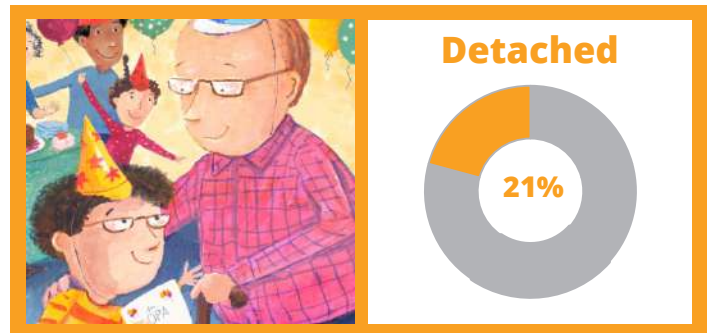
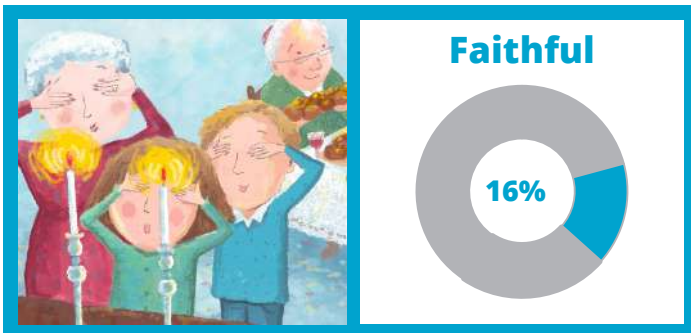
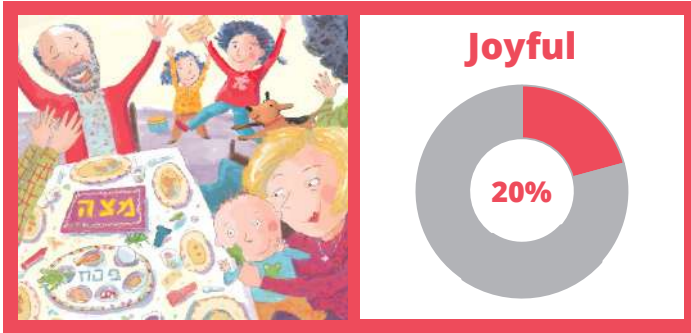
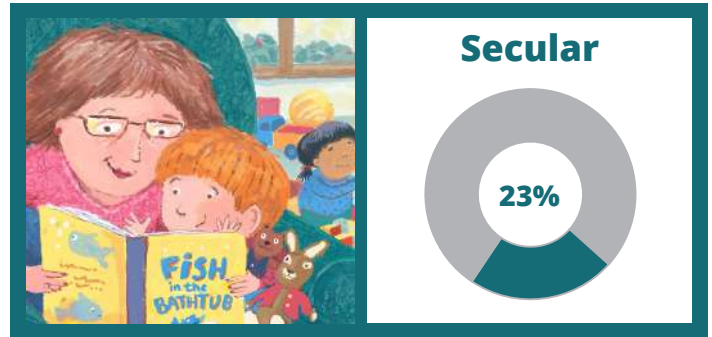
Less than half of grandparents are currently engaged in key elements of organized Jewish life.

Two-in-five grandparents belong to or participate in a synagogue, temple, or independent minyan, and far fewer are involved in a Jewish organization or JCC. While the pattern is similar among their adult children, they affiliate at slightly lower levels.





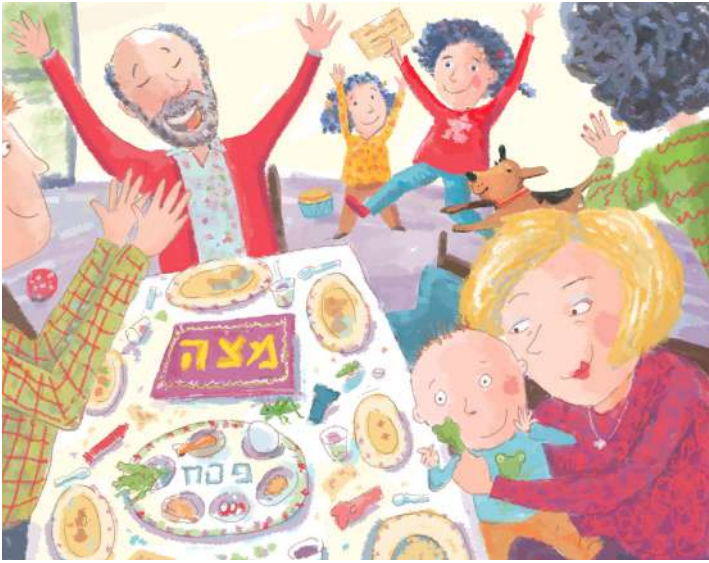
UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT GRANDPARENT-GRANDCHILD RELATIONSHIPS



In analyzing the data, it was important to go beyond looking at the Jewish grandparent population as a whole, in order to identify and understand the different types of grandparent-grandchild relationships that exist within this population. This was accomplished by having each respondent characterize his/her attitudes about grandparenting and about Judaism, as well as his/her Jewish aspirations for the randomly selected grandchild. Thirty-one statements were used to measure these attitudes using a five-point agree-disagree scale. Multivariate segmentation was then used to divide the 1,017 grandparent-grandchild relationship profiles into groups (or segments) based on attitude similarities derived from the thirty-one statements.

This statistical process teases out distinct segments or groupings that are interpretable and actionable. The statistical model found five different types of grandparent-grandchild relationships that are defined by similar attitudes, which are depicted above. While these grandparenting groups total 100%, it is important to note that a Jewish grandparent with more than one grandchild may well identify with more than one of these groups, depending on their different relationships with individual grandchildren and their overall attitudes toward grandparenting.

Joyful Grandparents — 20% of the nationally representative sample



Joyful grandparents 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.

Key statements they are *more* likely to agree strongly with include:

- Being a grandparent is generally a joyful experience
- Watching my adult child(ren) be parents is a great joy
- I feel respected by my child(ren) and grandchild(ren) in my role as a grandparent
- It is important to me to transmit Jewish values to my grandchild
- It is important to me to teach my grandchild about Jewish heritage, traditions and customs
- Being Jewish is an important part of my life
- It is important to support Jewish charities/causes
- I consider myself a spiritual person

Nearly two-thirds are members or regular participants in a synagogue or minyan. Their children participate at close to the same rate and tend to be married to other Jews.

Faithful Grandparents — 16% of the nationally representative sample



Faithful grandparents want their grandchildren to have a strong connection to Judaism and to marry other Jews. They are deeply committed grandparents, who are involved on a regular basis with their grandchildren and intentionally model Jewish behaviors for them.

Key statements they are *more* likely to agree strongly with include:

- I want my grandchild to have a strong connection to Judaism
- It is important to me to transmit Jewish values to my grandchild
- I want my grandchild to be interested in doing Jewish activities
- It is important to me that my grandchild marry a Jewish partner
- Being Jewish is an important part of my life
- It is important to support Jewish charities/causes

Over three-quarters are members or regular participants in a synagogue or minyan. Their children participate at close to the same rate and the vast majority are married to other Jews.

Secular Grandparents — 23% of the nationally representative sample



Secular grandparents 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.

Key statements they are *more* likely to agree strongly with include:

- Being a grandparent is generally a joyful experience
- I enjoy pampering my grandchild
- My grandchild only participates in Jewish programs and activities because it matters to their grandparent
- I wish that my kids had a greater appreciation for their Jewish heritage

Secular grandparents are among the least likely to describe themselves as religious or spiritual. Less than a quarter are members or regular participants in a synagogue or minyan, and two-thirds have a child whose spouse or partner does not identify as Jewish.

Wistful Grandparents — 20% of the nationally representative sample



Wistful grandparents 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.

Key statements they are *more* likely to agree strongly with include:

- I wish I could be more involved in my grandchild's life
- I don't always agree with how my grandchild's parents 'parent' (him/her)
- My ideas about child-rearing conflict with my adult child(ren)'s approach to parenting
- My child(ren) doesn't fully appreciate all I do as a grandparent

Key statements they are *less* likely to agree strongly with include:

- I feel respected by my child(ren) & grandchild(ren) in my role as a grandparent
- Being a grandparent is generally a joyful experience
- Being a grandparent has improved my relationship with my adult child(ren)

Over a third of Wistful grandparents are members or regular participants in a synagogue or minyan, and half have a child whose spouse or partner does not identify as Jewish.

Detached Grandparents — 21% of the nationally representative sample



Key statements they are *less* likely to agree strongly with include:

- It is important to me to transmit Jewish values to my grandchild
- I want my grandchild to have a strong connection to Judaism
- I want my grandchild to be interested in doing Jewish activities
- It is important to me that my grandchild marry a Jewish partner
- Being Jewish is an important part of my life
- I wish that my kids had a greater appreciation or their Jewish heritage
- I feel that it is important to support Jewish charities or causes

Detached grandparents are neither Jewishly engaged nor interested in passing on Jewish practices to their grandchildren. Most report satisfying family relationships and 25% provide grandchild caretaking. Their overall level of interaction with their grandchildren is more modest than other groups (except Wistful Grandparents).

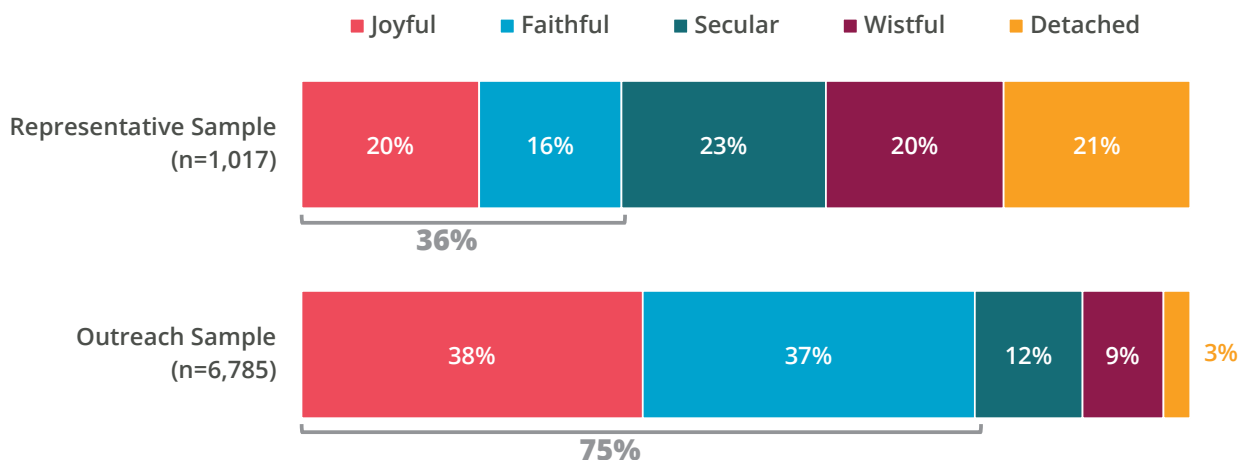
Less than one-in-seven Detached grandparents are members or regular participants in a synagogue or minyan. Over two-in-five are married to someone of another faith, and the vast majority have a child whose spouse or partner does not identify as Jewish.

A Note on the Outreach Sample

While the five grandparent-grandchild relationship groups are fairly evenly distributed across the nationally representative sample, that is not the case in the outreach sample which consists of grandparents who are, in some way, affiliated with organized Jewish life or who opted in to the study.

As the chart below illustrates, Joyful and Faithful grandparents, the two groups who are most actively engaged in Jewish life and in transmitting Jewish values and customs, are overrepresented in the outreach sample: 75% collectively versus 36% collectively in the nationally representative sample. Conversely, Secular, Wistful and Detached grandparents are all underrepresented in the outreach sample.

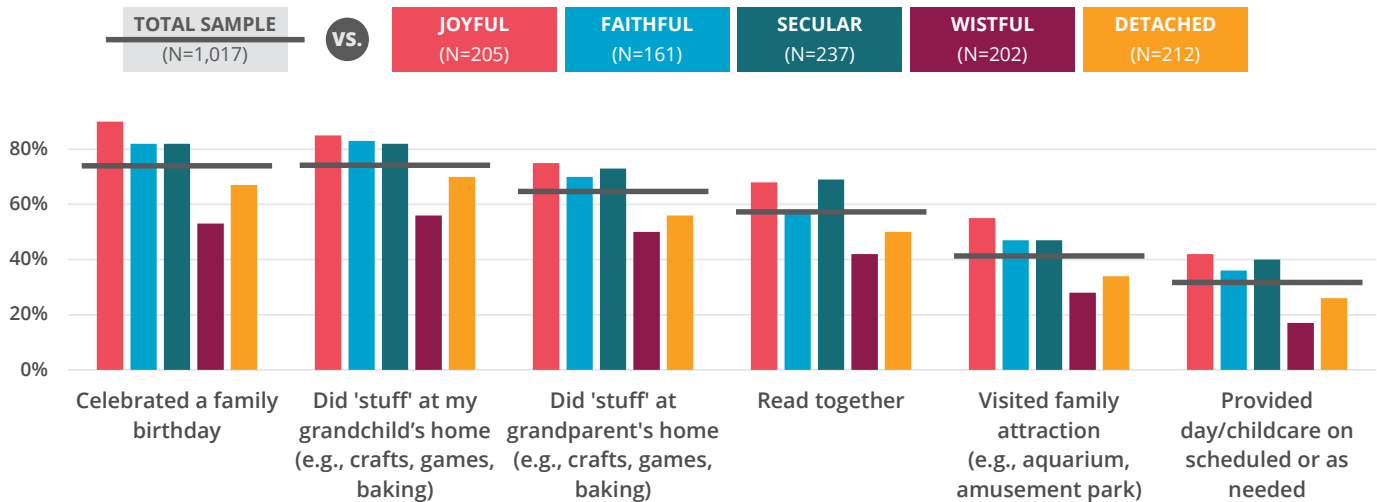
In order to provide the most accurate and complete picture of the diversity of grandparent-grandchild relationship across the U.S., we have focused on the findings from the nationally representative sample throughout the report and in the analysis.



Engaging the Different Grandparenting Groups

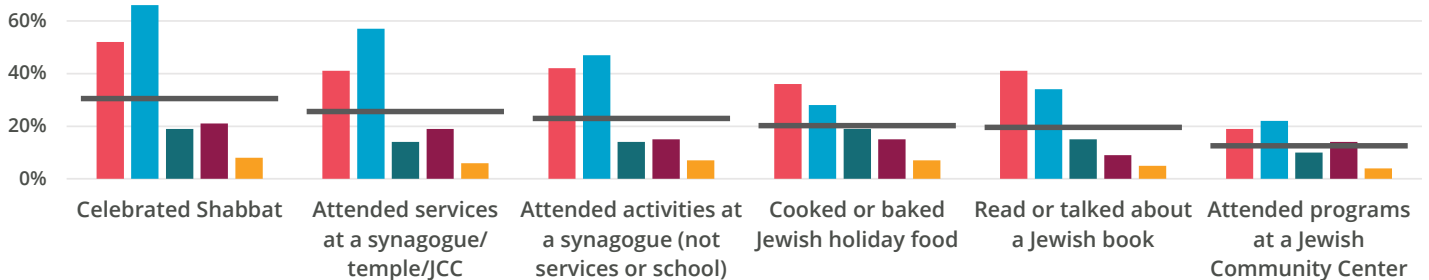
SECULAR ACTIVITIES DONE WITH GRANDCHILD – PAST YEAR

In determining how best to engage different cohorts in the community, Jewish communal organizations often begin with the question “What programs and services do they need?” In seeking to engage grandparents and their families, the data suggest that it is equally (or more) important to start by asking “Where are they?” As the chart demonstrates, in the total sample and across every group, the majority of grandparents are spending most of their time with their grandchild in their home and in their grandchild’s home.



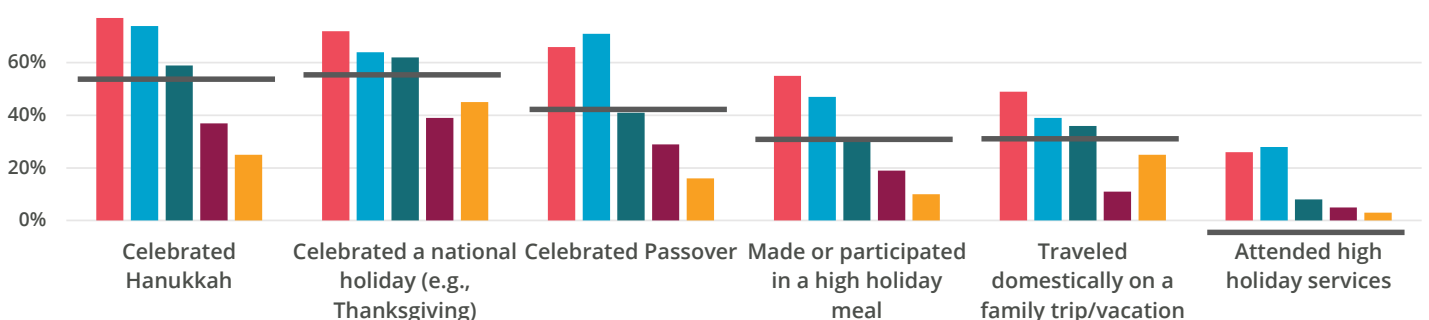
JEWISH ACTIVITIES DONE WITH GRANDCHILD – PAST YEAR

In contrast, grandparents and their grandchildren are far less likely to be spending time together in Jewish institutions or to be doing Jewish activities. 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.



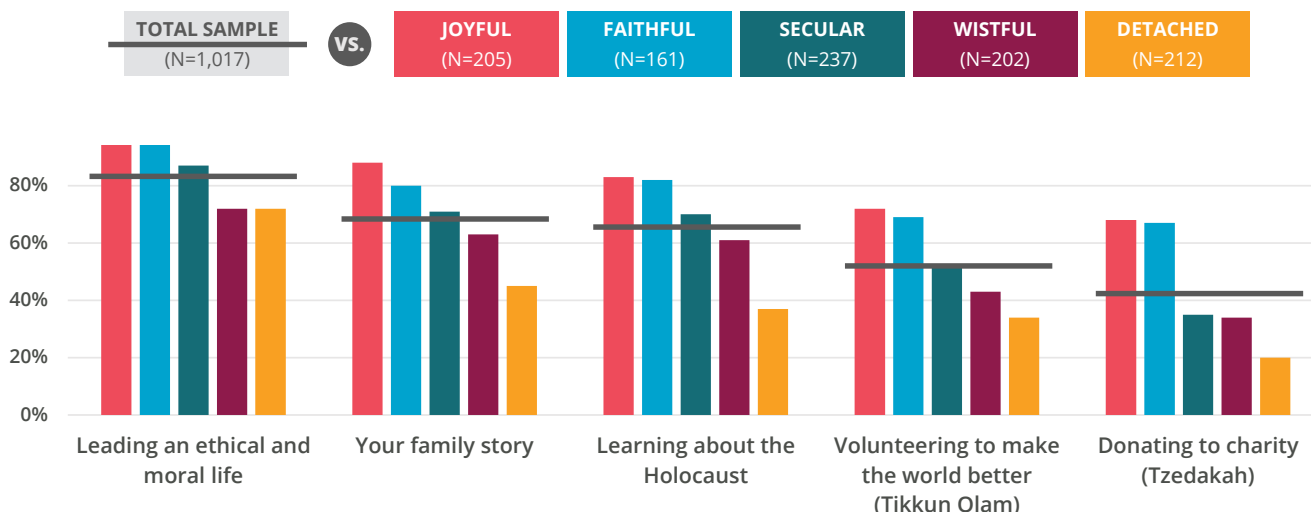
ACTIVITIES DONE WITH GRANDCHILD - PAST 3 YEARS

Grandparents participate in Hanukkah celebrations at least as frequently as national holiday celebrations (like Thanksgiving) among all groups except Detached grandparents. Only Joyful and Faithful grandparents celebrate Passover or the high holidays with their grandchild in significant numbers.



GRANDPARENT INTEREST IN PASSING ON CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

A number of the study's questions inquired about concepts and practices grandparents hope to pass on to their grandchildren. 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. However, some of the other concepts do not resonate as strongly with Wistful or Detached grandparents.



GRANDPARENT INTEREST IN PASSING ON JEWISH CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

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.



Conclusions

The first National Study of Jewish Grandparents offers direction for those Jewish communities and organizations seeking to engage Jewish grandparents and their families. The study provides essential data on grandparents' demographics, attitudes, practices, and aspirations. What emerges is a call for Jewish communities and organizations to consider a more nuanced approach to engaging Jewish grandparents and their families.

Comparisons between the data from the nationally representative sample and the outreach sample clearly show that the profile of grandparents currently involved or affiliated with Jewish institutions does not reflect the total Jewish grandparent population of an individual community. Engagement strategies should take this gap into consideration when beginning to plan.

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:

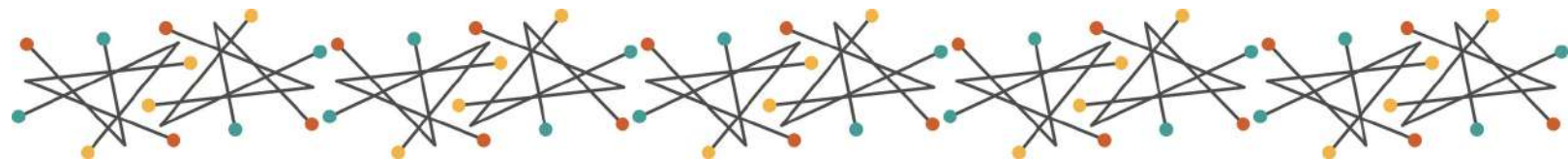
- Joyful and Faithful grandparents will be the most interested in creative new ways to transmit Jewish traditions and practices. As more of them are members of local Jewish organizations and institutions, they will be the most open to participating in programming in synagogues, JCCs, and other Jewish portals, in addition to home-based experiences.
- Secular grandparents, who are far less likely to be involved in organized Jewish life, 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.
- While Detached grandparents should be acknowledged for their caretaker role, it is clear that they are not seeking further engagement in Jewish life.

Jewish Boomers are embracing grandparenting with passion. Like grandparents everywhere, many Jewish grandparents are helping their multigenerational 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. For many grandparents, there is a genuine desire to pass on a Jewish legacy to grandchildren. When parents are committed to passing on a particular Jewish identity to their children, grandparents can be essential role models and allies. Conversely, when parents are ambivalent or disinterested, passionate grandparents can play a powerful role in helping grandchildren to shape a spiritual and religious identity.

The challenges Jewish grandparents face in this radically changed family landscape have placed them on the front lines of family engagement. Jewish institutions seeking to connect to families would be wise to acknowledge their efforts and enlist grandparents as partners. We believe the question should not be *whether* to engage grandparents but *how* to best accomplish this by supporting them as essential nurturers of Jewish families, cultivators of Jewish traditions and transmitters of Jewish values and narratives.

Finally, while not addressed in this study but identified through focus groups and interviews, Jewish grandparents must be seen as more than consumers of Jewish communal programs and services. 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. When the Jewish community truly engages grandparents as partners, listens carefully, and invites them to play a lead role in designing and piloting new initiatives, they will harness a remarkable resource. The experience, talent, wisdom and passion of today's Jewish grandparents will ultimately benefit the entire Jewish community.





The **Jewish Grandparents Network** is the first and only national organization supporting grandparents as they embrace both traditional and radically new roles in their families. Through research, network-building, advocacy, and institutional partnerships, we foster new models of grandparent engagement for the benefit of our families, our communities, and our future.

Lee M. Hendler, President & Co-Founder

David Raphael, CEO & Co-Founder

The National Study of Jewish Grandparents was designed, fielded and analyzed by **Impact:NPO**. The firm specializes in research, measurement and brand positioning designed to help nonprofit organizations achieve greater impact among the various constituencies they serve.

Karen Radkowsky, CEO & Founder

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- **Mike Leven**
- **The Covenant Foundation**
- **The Jim Joseph Foundation**

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Jewish Federations

Buffalo Jewish Federation
Greater Miami Jewish Federation
Jewish Federation of Cleveland
Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta
Jewish Federation of Greater Portland
Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County
Jewish Federation of the Heart of New Jersey
Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago
The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore

National and Community Organizations

Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPi)
Chai Village LA
Florence Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning
Interfaith Family
Jewish Community Center Association (JCCA)
Jewish Women's Archive
Momentum (formerly Jewish Women's Renaissance Project)
PJ Library



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