

Book Review

Grandad: All You Need to Know in One Concise Manual

by Andrew Parkinson

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I gave this book to my husband (grandfather of three) to read as he is ideal target audience. His first comment was: 'the joke is in the publisher's title, all men will recognise a Haynes Manual from tinkering with motorcycles and cars (an arcane fact unknown to most women), so is the idea that you can 'fix' childcare like you fix a faulty car engine?' It is a well-known that many men approach problems from a 'fixing' point of view. His second comment was that he wished he had been given this book – or manual – when he first became a grandad nine years ago; he thinks he would have been a better grandfather from day one if Santa had put it in his stocking that year.

With more and more parents out working, and 'blended' families after separation and divorce, grandparents have become increasingly called on to fill the childcare slot, and this book provides a host of ideas to turn a possible chore into a delight. When today's grandfathers were new dads, a generation ago, they weren't expected to participate as fully in their offsprings' care as today's fathers, so many 21st Century granddads may feel a bit baffled over how to entertain their grandchildren, especially babies and toddlers. They can no longer rely on women in families to do it. Andrew Parkinson's handy-sized book is a delight: packed with ideas for activities with toddlers to teens, with gorgeous colour photographs of happy children, and a gentle grey text that is easy on older eyes. This book should be in every grandad's Christmas stocking.

Chapter 1 deals with the challenges of the new role of being a grandad and how to surmount them; chapter 2 tackles indoor pursuits such as card games and tricks, some well tried and tested from our own childhoods, such as Beggar-my-Neighbour or making paper darts and others which require more practice. Chapter 3 deals with the great outdoors, such as beachcombing or studying the sky at night, and the final chapter gives ideas for toys to make at home, weapons and wands and a cardboard castle, complete with bows and arrows.

My one criticism is that the author doesn't suggest how to adapt activities to include a range of ages of grand children in a family. Within the same family, there will be older children who can sail through the games with ease while their younger siblings may struggle and get despondent. Equally, there is no mention of activities that might be suitable for children with special or individual needs, it tends to present a world of endless sunshine and fun. Andrew does, however include a very useful section called 'Tears, Tantrums and Terrible Twos'

Very importantly, Andrew Parkinson says, " Remember to switch off your mobile phone when you are with your grandchildren!". Mobile phones dominate our lives and many parents pay attention to their screens and away from their children so many youngsters may be missing out on that vital adult attention which helps them to grow up into confident, well balanced people with a strong contribution to make to society, so it's important that grandparents try to redress the balance. A recent study from Oxford University has found that regular contact with 'switched-on' grandparents helps to ease the transition from childhood to adolescence and later into well-adjusted adulthood. Andrew Parkinson's grandchildren have a head start with this transition and so will yours if you dip into this feast of suggestions.

Finally, the author acknowledged his debt to Diana Dean, Research Director at What About the Children for the very valuable and interesting information she provided him with on the emotional needs of children under three.