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'I only give advice if I am asked': Examining the grandmother's potential to influence infant feeding decisions and parenting practices of new mothers.

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BACKGROUND: Australia has high breastfeeding initiation rates however, at 3 and 6 months exclusive breastfeeding rates fall below global recommendations. Research suggests significant others in a woman's life can influence infant feeding decisions and practices but how and why they do so needs investigation. **RESEARCH QUESTION:** This study explored grandmothers' perceptions of their role in supporting new families and examined the potential for grandmothers to influence infant feeding decisions and parenting practices of new mothers in an area of Sydney, Australia, with low breastfeeding maintenance rates. **PARTICIPANTS AND METHOD:** A qualitative, descriptive study was conducted in South Western Sydney, Australia. Eleven grandmothers participated in one to one interviews and three of these also participated in a group discussion. **RESULTS:** Analysis revealed three themes: 'Presence'; 'Position'; and 'Power versus Preservation' which provide insight into the complexity of the grandmother-new mother relationship and describe the potential influence that grandmothers may have on infant feeding and parenting. **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:** The findings highlight challenges and dilemmas faced by grandmothers in their supportive role for the new mother in her breastfeeding and early parenting experience and the difficulties grandmothers face in balancing potential risks and rewards in their interactions with the new family. Copyright © 2009 Australian College of Midwives. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

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