

## GROWING UP

### Transitioning to Being a Caregiver for Grandchildren

By Dan Florell, Ph.D. & Praveena Salins, M.D.

The birth of a child is not only a major event for the parents but also for grandparents. The introduction of a new generation of the family can provide a lot of joy for grandparents. It also can mean an increased level of responsibility as over sixty percent of grandparents take on a major caregiver role for their grandchildren.

The increased caregiving role for grandparents is not consistent with most people's perception of grandparenthood. Grandparents are viewed as providing grandchildren with nurturance and being allowed to "spoil" their grandkids with treats, presents, and other special events. This role works well when grandchildren see their grandparents infrequently throughout the year.

However, many grandparents are asked to do much more with their grandchildren as they become major caregivers to them. The shift in grandparent responsibilities has occurred as more mothers have continued to work after having children and the increasing number of single parent families. As a result, grandparents have been asked to step in and provide much of the childcare for younger children and to provide care for older children after school.

The increased caregiving responsibility has meant spending much more time with the grandchildren and the need to shift the role grandparents play in their grandchildren's lives. While grandparents continue to nurture, they also must become more like parents in regards to setting limits.

One area of setting limits that is often inconsistent between parents and grandparents is discipline. Different generations have distinct ways of handling child discipline and these approaches can vary greatly. One example is that spanking was a very common approach to reprimanding children when they had disobeyed back when grandparents raised their children. However, this approach has changed and today many parents prefer for children to have time outs or have toys taken away.

A second area is in regards to the rules of the household. Children thrive when there is consistency across settings regarding the rules. Grandparents need to sit down with parents and discuss the rules of the household so that consistency can be established. This means establishing universal, concrete rules that have common rewards for obeying the rules and common punishments for disobeying them in both parent and grandparent households.

A third area of setting limits is the amount and type of food children are allowed. When grandparents become major caregivers to their grandchildren, they can no longer "spoil" their grandchildren by giving them special treats every day. Young children who frequently eat candy, drink soda, and go to fast food restaurants often become obese and can suffer from various health ailments including diabetes, sleep apnea, and high blood pressure. It is better for grandparents to stock their pantry full of healthy snack foods like yogurt, raisins and other fruits and vegetables.

It is okay to have a “special” treat once a week, but the danger comes when a “special” treat occurs once or twice a day.

As grandparents take on a more significant role in caring for their grandkids, it is important to get on the same page as their parents regarding discipline and to provide them with healthy food. Of course don’t skimp on plenty of hugs and kisses for those grandkids too.

Biography:

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