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Family Focus

By Margie Ryerson, MFT



Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a marriage and family therapist in Orinda and Walnut Creek. Contact her at (925) 376-9323 or margierye@yahoo.com. She is the author of "Treat Your Partner Like a Dog: How to Breed a Better Relationship" and "Appetite for Life: Inspiring Stories of Recovery from Anorexia, Bulimia, and Compulsive Overeating."

nod and agree but then let them bend the rules. So they're my kids' heroes, but they aren't respecting my wishes and I have resentment. I've tried to explain why it's important to me that they implement my rules, but they're stubborn and don't listen. It's very frustrating.

Mother of two: My mother has been a disappointment and borders on hurtful. She only seems to want to be with me alone, and she practically ignores our kids. She doesn't talk much to them if we're all together - just to me.

Mother of two: My parents are great with our kids. My in-laws, however, boss them around a lot when they come to stay with us, and our kids don't respond well to them when they do this. My husband won't speak up to them about this, and I don't feel comfortable talking to them about it. So we just survive their visits and try to appreciate their good intentions and point the positives out to our children.

Mother of one: I am the mom of a 2-year-old little girl. Our daughter is the first grandchild in the family so naturally she is a bit indulged by her grandparents. I appreciate their help and support a lot, and I try to thank them often. My only complaint is when they go overboard and give her too many expensive toys and gifts. Both grandmothers become insulted if I ask them to please hold back.

Father of two: My mother-in-law is very involved with our sons. She reads to them and plays games. She is fun to be with and energetic. They have an excellent relationship. I only wish that my parents would spend time with my sons as well. Instead, they are very busy with their own lives

"Nobody can do for little children what grandparents do. Grandparents sort of sprinkle stardust over the lives of little children." ~Alex Haley

Families are fortunate if they have grandparents who are willing and able to participate in the lives of their grandchildren. Grandparents can offer an abundance of caring, acceptance, and attention, all of which contribute to the sense of security, identity and emotional well-being of a child. Often they are role models, mentors, and historians - teaching values, instilling ethnic heritage, and passing on family traditions.

Having recently become a grandma of the cutest, best behaved, most appealing grandbabies - What? You say that yours are in fact the best in every way? But how can that be? - I thought it would be useful to hear some parents' perspectives on grandparents. What do they appreciate and what needs to be improved?

Since parents and grandparents each have their own parenting style, it is important to have open communication and form agreements. Here are some concerns about grandparents from local residents:

Mother of three: My parents are very good to our children in many ways, but there is one big problem. When I ask them not to let our kids watch too much TV or to go to bed at a certain time, they

and see them only on special occasions.

Mother of three: Early on I was able to talk to my mom about not giving me advice on parenting unless I asked her for it. Luckily she listened to me, and now I can tell her if it's happening again. This helps our relationship run smoothly now.

Some parent-grandparent relationships require intervention. A grandmother I see in my practice is finally making peace with her adult son, a recent widower, who has her only grandchild. After his wife died she took it upon herself to do chores in his home, including straightening his dresser drawers and doing his laundry. When he asked her not to help without being asked, she ignored him and continued. When she took his daughter for a pedicure without checking with him first, he became so resentful that he cut ties with her for a long time. It wasn't all one-sided though. Her son rarely thanked her or expressed appreciation. It took a long time before this adult mother and son could communicate more openly, move on from past resentments, and respect each other's boundaries.

When the grandparent relationship works well it is a wonderful addition to the family unit. Grandparents provide children with added love, support and acceptance that in turn help strengthen a child's sense of self-worth. And because many grandparents have an asset which parents may not readily have - time - they can help enrich a grandchild's life with extra attention and activities.

Communication and cooperation are essential to establishing a positive relationship among the generations. We need to discuss our preferences, values, and rules with each other. We also need to show appreciation and respect for each other. Everyone benefits when relationships are healthy and grandparents can be well-integrated into the family.

Reach the reporter at: margieryr@yahoo.com

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