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Family Focus

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anything they are doing that bothers "Gabby," their daughter-in-law, and he reassures them that nothing is wrong. It is hard and hurtful for Melanie and David to have such limited access to their grandchildren, and they feel powerless to change the situation.

Frequently, as in the case of Melanie and David's family, no one will discuss underlying issues that have led to some degree of estrangement. And sadly, grandparents have no way of knowing how to remedy the situation.

Another set of grandparents, Mitch and Sue, decided to take it upon themselves to propose visiting their son and daughter-in-law and family in another state rather than wait for an invitation that never seemed to come. Several times now they have said they would be in the area and would like to visit. They have never been invited to stay in their son's house, although relatives on his wife's side have been welcome to stay with them. They know they will stay in a nearby hotel, clear their plans with their son and family ahead of time, and limit their stay to just a few days. They are careful to accept any limits their son and daughter-in-law present and to speak and behave in only positive ways. It has been hurtful and hard to be treated like distant relatives who aren't really welcome.

Both sets of grandparents had a good relationship with their sons when they were growing up. Although it's been mystifying as to why they are now deemed to be peripheral people in their sons' lives, each couple knows that their best course of action is to wait and be patient. They tried early on to find out what they could do to improve the relationships, but once they were told that "there was nothing wrong," they knew not to keep inquiring. If they speak up too often or forcefully, they could risk jeopardizing what little relationship they still have.

Too often the reasons behind this kind of shabby treatment are not rational and reasonable. Some friends who considered themselves loving and generous with their adult children and little grandson were criticized by their son-in-law for not contributing enough each month to their grandson's 529 college fund. The son-in-law is from an extremely wealthy family who are able to contribute large sums of money to the fund, whereas our friends give what they can afford. Sadly, this issue has interfered with our friends' ability to see their grandson as often as they would like. And of course, the grandchildren in these situations are also the ones who are missing out on these valuable relationships with their grandparents.

Many people have unresolved issues with a number of things in their lives. Sometimes they project their dissatisfactions with their work or their relationships onto others. Parents of adult children and their partners can be the unfortunate recipients of various resentments and judgments that are not really warranted. And

"Young people need something stable to hang on to?- a culture connection, a sense of their own past, a hope for their own future. Most of all, they need what grandparents can give them.." ~ Jay Kesler

"Grandparents, like heroes, are as necessary to a child's growth as vitamins." ~ Joyce Allston

If you are fortunate enough to be a grandparent, you know what a special position you hold. And how you have even more people in your life to love and nurture. But what if you don't feel very appreciated for all of your efforts and caring? Or, worse, what if you feel criticized when you are only trying to help? Sadly, some grandparents experience hurt from their children and their children's partners, the parents of their beloved grandchildren.

"Melanie" and "David" zoomed with me to discuss ways to cope with their difficult family situation. They have two grandchildren, ages 2 and 5, and their son and daughter-in-law live an hour away. Melanie always thought that when her only child, her son, had a family of his own, she would be closely involved in helping with the children. She has offered to babysit, but her offer has never been accepted. Yet her daughter-in-law's mother, who lives nearby the family, babysits frequently. Melanie and David see the grandchildren for birthdays and holidays, and the little ones always seem to enjoy being with them. They have asked their son if there is

because some adult children don't examine their own issues and address them in constructive ways, they can be quick to find fault with others.

If you are among the grandparents who are not being treated fairly and respectfully, there are important steps you can take for yourselves. You can continue to be respectful of your grandchildren's parents by asking permission before sending gifts and also by asking for gift suggestions. You can exhibit patience and willingness to take direction from them when it comes to interacting with your grandchildren. You want to be sure you comply with the parents, especially if they are sticklers about things like food, screen time, etc.

In addition, you can work with a family therapist on your own and include your adult children in sessions if they are willing. Many adult children appreciate their parents' willingness to be responsive to them and accepting of their viewpoints. If your adult children are unwilling to participate, it is especially important for you to find support for your understandable hurt and frustration. Books, such as "Rules of Estrangement: Why Adult Children Cut Ties and How to Heal the Conflict" by Joshua Coleman, PhD., can help and so can sharing your pain with trusted friends and family. And as always, don't hesitate to talk to a professional if you are experiencing unhappiness from this kind of heartache.

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