

Tips for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren and Other Family Members



One of the biggest and most challenging tasks facing some families today centers around the trend of grandparents to raise their grandchildren. Across the country, a growing number of children are being parented by grandparents and other relatives.

Parenting grandchildren is totally different from parenting one's own children. To begin with, parents of stereotypical families do not usually have intrusive adult children interfering with their parenting of the younger children. Grandparents raising their grandchildren often face additional challenges; abuse, drug addiction, and other problems brought on by biological parents may cause special medical, psychological, and educational needs for these grandchildren.

Many children in these families are angry with their parents, confused by their absence, and divided in their loyalties. Children may not be afraid that showing affection to their grandparents in front of their parents, or showing affection to their parents in front of their grandparents will hurt the other adults.

Because of emotional frailties of these children, grandparents often have mixed feelings about how to discipline them. They may feel that the children are already having a difficult and painful time dealing with the absence of their parents and that discipline will only make the children feel more lonely and punished. These grandparents may become overprotective of their grandchildren. At the other extreme, some grandparents set overly rigid boundaries for these children because they are terrified that the children will repeat the malignant behavior of their parents.

There are many things grandparents can do to nurture the grandchildren they are raising.

- Read to the grandchildren every day. Make reading a relaxing activity. Read aloud some funny or interesting parts of your favorite book. Older children might be interested in a riddle book for kids, or a magazine, or newspaper story. If the child likes a movie based on a book, read the book with them after they've watched the movie. Find articles or books on subjects of interest to them, especially if it has nothing to do with schoolwork.
- Help them learn to practice safety on wheels.
- Buckle seatbelts, use car seats, wear helmets and other appropriate safety wear when riding bikes, skateboarding and roller blading.
- Make sure their immunizations are current. If the children are not covered by health insurance, access other resources for medical care through Social Services.
- Provide nutritious food and prepare meals that follow the food guide pyramid recommendations.
- Set a good example by working out disputes without violence and by remembering that words can hurt too.
- Monitor TV programs, movies and music that the children see and hear.
- Most importantly, make your grandchild feel loved and important.

Grandparents wanting more information about raising their grandchildren can receive a free subscription to "**Parenting Grandchildren: A Voice for Grandparents**" from the American Association of Retired Persons, Grandparent Information Center, 601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049.