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Relations Between Grandparent and Grandchild

Despite the age difference, the relationship between grandparent and grandchild can be a special one; it makes elders feel young again and gives children a richer view of the world. So how can you, as the parent, foster this kind of relationship and bridge the generational gap? The tips below offer a few suggestions:

Agree on the ground rules. Everyone has their own take on childrearing, so it's wise to discuss what you feel are appropriate activities, TV programs, discipline, etc., before they become an issue.

Be flexible. Let go of minor style discrepancies. Children understand that different households have different rules, and so should you. Bend to meet the grandparents halfway on less significant rules, but stand your ground on issues that are really important to you.

Give grandparents and grandchildren an opportunity to connect. Set up a regular visiting time for the whole family to get together. If grandparents live further away, then encourage your child to e-mail, phone or write on a regular basis, and make an effort to gather for major holidays or celebrations.

Embrace traditions. Most grandparents relish the opportunity to pass on cultural and family traditions, and share customs from another era or country. Not only can these celebrations be a fun bonding experience, but they may also pique children's interest in their heritage and family history.

Take a walk down memory lane. Encourage children to ask their grandparents questions about their own childhood and life experiences. Pull out old photo albums and home movies, and let kids connect with grandma or grandpa. This kind of communication affirms the older generation's wisdom and lets children in on a well-kept secret: Grandparents were once kids too.

Invite grandparents to sporting events, school plays, graduations, etc. Including your parents or in-laws helps them feel involved and provides kids with extra support during big and not-so-big moments in their life. If grandparents live far away, videotape or take pictures of the activities, and be sure to send them off with an accompanying note or message from the grandchild.

Get kids to help out at grandma/grandpa's house. Whether it's washing grandpa's car or cleaning out grandma's garage, encourage your children to lend a helping hand to their elders. It teaches them to be considerate of others and makes grandparents feel special.

Keep in touch after a divorce. Unless there's a good reason not to stay in contact, try to maintain a good relationship with your in-laws after a divorce. An ongoing, stable relationship with grandparents can help kids adjust during this difficult time.

Although many years may separate grandparent from grandchild, there are plenty of ways to bridge this gap. Consider the suggestions outlined in this article, and be sure to keep the lines of communication open between all generations—yourself included.

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