

Polk/Burnett Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Newsletter



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Building Resiliency in Children Who are in the Care of Grandparents

Inside this issue:

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- *Develop Trust*
- *Establish Positive Communication*
- *Positive Role Model*

Topics in Future Issues:

Discipline Techniques
Taking Care of You
*Grandchild's Health
and Safety*

Special points of interest:

Recognize and
validate needs and
emotions.

Provide positive
feedback.

Develop and
maintain family
traditions.

Anticipate
transitions.

Emphasize
positive
reinforcement.

Children living in grandparent-maintained homes differ in several ways from those living with their parents. Grandchildren are more likely to be needy due to a combination of genetic and environmental facts. Often they experience exposure to drugs and/or alcohol before birth, and may have a history of living in an abusive or neglectful home environment. Grandchildren frequently have difficulties forming attachments. While many act out, others may cope by becoming either withdrawn, non-verbal, or "too good to be true."

Grandparented children often deal with many troubling and confusing emotions. Common feelings include grief and loss, fear, guilt, embarrassment and anger. All children will benefit from nurturing caregiving which goes beyond simply meeting the basic needs. Child development experts agree that children raised in loving and responsive homes benefit socially, emotionally, and academically. Creating a positive home environment, developing trust, establishing positive communications, and providing positive role models will all encourage grandchildren to become resilient and to develop skills for dealing with unique challenges in their lives.

Create a Caring Environment

Grandparents need to let grandchildren know that they are unconditionally loved. Children need to believe that

grandparents' love will remain strong, no matter what they say or do. Consistent modeling of loving behaviors, recognition of the child's needs and emotions as valid, and plenty of positive feedback are great first steps toward establishing this type of home. These practices must become routine for them to be effective. As one grandmother said, "*Loving them doesn't just mean buying them treats at the grocery store every once in a while.*" When grandparents spend positive time with their grandchildren they are saying, "I value you. You are worth taking time for." Grandchildren benefit from knowing how much they are loved, both verbally and physically.

Develop Trust

Children benefit greatly from consistency and certainty in their lives. Establishing routines for daily tasks is a necessary first step. This helps kids feel that their environment is a friendly place that's worth trusting. Established routines for simple things like meals and bedtime will smooth the way for larger transitions like saying goodbye or moving. These established routines are important steps in developing a trusting relationship. Choose one or two routines to start with and be sure they are established habits before setting another goal. Established routines and trust, take time to develop and grandparents may need encouragement if their efforts aren't bringing about quick results.

Websites:

<http://www.AARP.org/getans/grandparents.html>

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/grandparent>

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/grandparent/view.html>

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Inconsistencies in early home situations leave many grandchildren feeling disconnected to a family unit. They miss out on hearing and being part of treasured family stories. Special personal items, including photo albums, family videos, and keepsake boxes are generally not part of their lives. These oral traditions and historical mementoes are vital to enhancing identity and self-esteem in young children. By celebrating “new” family holidays, such as the anniversary your child arrived, you are developing new family traditions that connect them to family roots.

Establish Positive Communication

Life with young children is often hectic and fast paced. In spite of good intentions, it’s often easier to tell kids what NOT to do than to focus on positive suggestions. Positive reinforcement (for example, “*I like how you remembered to say ‘Please,’*” or “*Thank you for putting away your boots.*”) will go a long way in helping children to get along with others. Children see themselves as valued and worthy of positive communications, which often results in increased self-concept and more positive behaviors.

Provide Children with Effective Role Models

Raising a child is a big job, and grandparents can’t do it all by themselves. It’s important for grandparents to look for opportunities to use other adults to develop strong and loving relationships with their grandchildren. These role models might include extended family members, neighbors, friends, or community volunteers. It may take a special effort at first to establish these relationships. Remembering how much these outside relationships will benefit their grandchild helps to make this process easier.

Summary

Using the goals listed above will assist grandparents in providing a home environment that nurtures grandchildren and enables them to develop skills for successful living. Developing a plan of action, communicating it to all other involved family members, and sticking with the plan greatly increases grandparents’ chances of success. It’s an important investment in insuring that grandchildren grow up to be productive adults and eventually, effective parents of their own young children.

Source:

Lannison, L., Smith, A. for Family Information Services, Minneapolis, MN ©2003, Reprinted with permission.



Additional information:

Empowering Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (2000) by Carole B. Cox, published by Springer Publishing Co.

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