THE TOP SIX GRANDPARENT MISTAKES®

By: GRAND Magazine

for awesome grandparents...
THE TOP SIX GRANDPARENT MISTAKES

THAT sounds a little dramatic! So your kids are having kids. What’s the biggie? Hey, you’ve paid your dues. You’re going to play with the darling little baby and hand it over when it needs maintenance. Easy!

Well, it could happen like that. No two families are exactly alike but usually there is more to it. To start off right with the child, it is ESSENTIAL to have the best possible relationship with the parents.

The Parents. Saying THAT might take some getting used to. WE’RE the parents, right? And giving advice is what we do, preparing the young for some far-off time when they must make decisions on their own.
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Hello!...it’s that time! Ready or not, the parents are in charge. “But they’re so young!”, you say. “We were more mature when we became parents.”

LOL! Even if that WERE true, it doesn’t matter now.

At GRAND, we get to meet joyful families of three or four generations, firmly bonded by love and strengthened by mutual respect. Sadly, we also meet families alienated from each other, often permanently. There may be fault to go around, but the rift was usually preventable.

Alienation punishes everyone, and especially the children, who grow up without the security, love and wisdom that only grandparents can provide.

So, check out these Six Biggest Blunders, and begin this special life adventure on the right foot!
#1 START SPREADING THE NEWS

Feel honored that they shared their secret with you, but make sure the parents-to-be are ready to spread the news before you tell anyone else.

Sometimes they have reasons for not wanting the world to know too soon — concern for the progress of a first pregnancy, or job-related issues. One young woman came from an upbringing where it was considered “bad luck” to talk about the pregnancy before three months, but her husband couldn’t wait to tell his mother.

Of course, she was excited to compare grandparenting notes with her son’s in-laws the next time they met — too bad their daughter hadn’t told them!

The birth announcement is probably your very first exchange as a “grandparent-to-be” and it’s a good time to establish that you will respect their wishes where your grandchild is concerned.
THE TOP SIX GRANDPARENT MISTAKES

#2 YOU’RE NAMING HER WHAT??

This generation’s choices are different than yours*. When your kids announce they want to name the baby “Apple,” your response must be positive (“Wow!” is always a good answer.) Practice this in advance!

I was told about one grandmother who received a call from the new dad as soon as the baby was born. He told her the birth went fine and announced they had named the baby Horatio. Her knee-jerk reaction was to blurt out “You’ve got to be kidding.” Luckily, her son has a sense of humor — but she’s still living that down.

* It may help to remember how names come in an out of fashion as cultures forever mix and adapt. Headstones in an old cemetery tell the story – ‘normal’ is temporary.
THE TOP SIX GRANDPARENT MISTAKES

#3 YOU SURVIVED, SO I MUST BE AN EXPERT

Baby-raising techniques have changed since you did it. The experts are different, the books are different. Babies who used to sleep on their stomachs now sleep on their backs for a good reason.

Rather than offering medical advice, another approach might be to pick up a copy of a current guide to pregnancy and birth for the new parents. The first time this really comes to light is when the new mother brings her baby home.

With hospital stays so short these days, often one of the grandmothers comes to help during the first week. I know one grandmother so insistent on her views about the feeding schedule that the parents finally asked her to go home.
THE TOP SIX GRANDPARENT MISTAKES

#4 DON’T ASK – JUST_ASSUME

Lots of grandparents think they’re supposed to “drop in” and visit. A much better idea is to prove your worth, so you’re truly welcome — by babysitting, doing dishes, shopping, dog walking or whatever you can do to really help out.

It can be your “ticket in” to develop a great relationship with your grandchild. Just be sure to ask first — don’t take over the house. You may think you’re being helpful by cleaning the kitchen, when your daughter (or daughter-in-law) interprets this as criticism of her housekeeping.
#4 DON’T ASK – JUST ASSUME - continued

It all comes back to good communication. Babysitting while the new mom is napping is a big help — if the baby doesn’t sleep, mom doesn’t sleep. That’s why young mothers get exhausted. And after all, how many people will new parents trust to babysit a new baby?

It’s a very short list, and grandparents are usually at the top of it. On the end of the spectrum, new grandmothers who are asked to baby-sit sometimes feel “taken advantage of”. If this is the case, don’t let resentment build up. You can always say “I’m not available to baby-sit, but what else can I do to help?”
#5 LOOK WHAT I BOUGHT!

Your desire to help your kids can turn sour in a moment if you start buying what you think they need or want. Make offers, listen closely and buy only after agreement has been reached.

One mother-in-law showed up at her granddaughter’s christening with a christening dress in hand. Needless to say, they hadn’t planned on christening the baby naked, and had an heirloom gown from her godmother’s family. But worrying about whether or not her mother-in-law’s feelings were hurt added stress to the day.

There can also be a delicate balance between your delight in buying gifts for your grandchild and the parents’ concerns about their child becoming spoiled. A good rule of thumb — don’t bring a gift without the parents’ knowledge and approval. It can build up resentment.
#6 THAT’S NOT HOW WE DID IT...

Remember that your kids set the rules here. Bedtime, feeding time, bath time, naptime, what the child is wearing, what the child is playing with — those decisions belong to the parents. Whether you agree or disagree, the best rule of thumb is to only offer advice if asked.

The corollary to this is praise, praise, praise. The most important thing you can do to ensure your welcome as a new grandparent is to tell your child what a good job they are doing as a parent, and how proud you are of them.
THE TOP SIX GRANDPARENT MISTAKES

Editor’s Note...

You probably noticed a common theme. The birth of a first grandchild changes family roles overnight!

The grandparent role is critically important and highly satisfying, but it can be challenging, especially for the ‘take charge’ types.

A joyful reward awaits those who make the adjustment; and the sooner, the better!

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