

Growing Parent[®]

There is no easy way

By Carol Gestwicki

A

young father I know was undergoing his daily struggle with his 3-year-old son about naptime.

He reasoned, he cajoled and coaxed, he threatened, he bargained, and finally, he backed down.

He turned to me, sighing, "I wish there were an easier way."

Late in the afternoon, when the nap-less youngster became more and more irritable, and his behavior finally deteriorated into a temper tantrum, I considered the father's remark again.

Probably one of the most difficult facts for many parents to absorb is that there really is no easy way. There is no magic formula for turning children into cooperative, self-controlled social beings.

However much parents might wish to avoid the responsibility of being the limit-setter and arbiter in every situation, this is what it means to be a parent of a young child. In fact, once a parent has accepted this basic premise, life does become a lot simpler for both child and parent.

For the child, life is simpler because the heavy weight of being asked to make decisions that are beyond his developmental abilities is removed. With the adult clearly in charge, the child is free to move about confidently in a world that has clearly defined parameters and expectations for behavior.

If limits and expectations are clearly drawn, they are accepted as real. But if they are drawn with

a shaky hand, there is uncertainty for the child about the rules of the game, and the child has the burden of continually struggling with the adult to find the limit.

For the parent who accepted the idea that adults must firmly guide the lives of young children, there is less frustration caused by skirmishes between the two sides so unequal in judgment and experience.

Running into trouble.

What has got parents into this shaky position of debating and bargaining with their children?

Some parents, with optimistic benevolence, plan to manage their family life as a pure democracy with all decisions being made in partnership, being reasoned by equals.

This idea does not take into account the fundamental differences in thinking, reasoning powers, and self-control of children and adults.

So, what can a parent do to avoid the impasse discussions?

• Realize that there is an important difference between being authoritarian and being authoritative.

The authoritarian parent rules as an absolute dictator. This parent doesn't care about a child's opinions or wishes, demanding only unquestioning obedience and punishing any deviation from it.

The authoritative parent, on the other hand, is confident in the role of guide and limit-setter.

The fundamental difference is in

the way power is viewed. In authoritarian situations, parents keep and exert all the power, often for the sake of the power itself.

In authoritative situations, parents progressively share more and more power with children as their abilities develop.

• Consider which decisions are yours to make.

These will change as children grow older, but in the beginning, parents are in charge of all the major aspects of living.

Children may still exercise some measure of control within the broader decision made by the parent.

In the naptime situation, for example, the parent might announce that it was naptime, then ask the child whether he'd like to walk or be carried to the bedroom, or whether he'd rather have a story read or a song sung before the light is turned out.

The big decisions about *what* must happen are the parent's. The smaller ones about *how* it can happen are the child's.

• Accept children's right to dislike your decisions and to express that dislike.

Parents need not feel threatened when children heartily protest. Crying or yelling, "I don't like you, you're a mean daddy," really means that the child quite naturally doesn't like a restriction placed on his absolute freedom.

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Being faced with a child's displeasure is not easy, but parents who are looking past the moment know they will have to take sometimes-unpopular stands. Allowing children the right to be unhappy and to voice that unhappiness are necessary parts of learning how to deal with frustration.

Acceptance of the right to dislike the decision may be expressed as, "I know you'd rather keep on playing, but you need a nap." Or, "I'm sorry you don't want a nap now, but it's time." The child's feelings are recognized while the decision stands.

• **Understand that there is no one right way to bring up children.**

Parents have to make decisions in the face of conflicting advice. This certainly can be confusing,

and probably contributes to the hesitancy that makes parents back down.

Parents need to realize that when it comes to the family situation and their child, they are the true experts. Don't be swayed by opinions of others.

• **Explain to children why you make the decisions you do.**

They may not agree with your decision, but you are giving them the knowledge they will need eventually to make good decisions of their own. But explain briefly, and don't get drawn into debates or extended justification.

"When you play hard, a rest helps keep you going." Period. Not, "Well, last time you didn't ... " or "If you don't take a nap, you won't be able to ..." or "Daddy knows what's best for you ..."

With every moment of extended deliberation, uncertainty for

parents and children grows, and the outcome is likely to deteriorate into someone's unhealthy use of power.

• **Remember who's in charge here.** Parents have the role of guide because of their vastly greater experience, knowledge, and development. It is enormously reassuring to children to be able to believe that their parents are dependable and reliable.

There is, in the end, no easy way, but considering these ideas may make it easier. □

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Grandparents: special friends for your children

By Diane Jeray

Remember the smell of your grandmother's house? The one that seemed to be made up of cookies baking, freshly starched aprons and waxed floors?

Remember how special you felt when she let you stand on her stool with the foldout steps to watch her bake at the counter?

Or the way your grandfather always let you "help" when he fixed anything or did any work around the house?

Most of us who were lucky enough to have known and spent time with our grandparents as

children still carry magical memories of those times and of the loving bond shared with these special friends of our childhood.

Now, we find that we are the parents, and our own parents are the grandparents. Will our children develop the same kind of memories of their grandparents that we have?

Things are so different now from when we were growing up. The days of starched aprons and floor wax are gone, as is the certainty that Grandma will be staying home baking cookies on any given day.

But the importance of the relationship between children and their grandparents is as important as ever for all three generations, for a grandparent can give a child some things that no one else can.

Unconditional love

Because they are free from all of the responsibilities of parenting, grandparents feel a freedom to love their grandchildren absolutely, without conditions.

Unlike parents, they do not feel the duty constantly to train, teach, and prepare the child for life.

To the grandparent, the reason the child exists is to be loved, and most of the time spent with the grandchildren involves different ways of expressing that love.

Most grandparents are in a different phase of their lives than when they were parents themselves. More financially secure, free of the many demands of raising children and of struggling to establish themselves in their careers, they often have more quality time to spend with children than parents do. They are freer to give larger amount of undivided attention to each child and to take a slower pace about things.

Grandparents can make a child feel needed. Often, with their own children grown, grandparents feel a void in their lives. They need to hear the noises of children in the house again occasionally, to have a small hand to fill their own, or a few finger marks left on the refrigerator.

Grandchildren who fill this void can sense they are needed somehow. This adds an extra richness to the love children receive from grandparents.

They come to feel the importance of the place they occupy in the family history by learning about the people who came before. And in watching their grandparent's progress through the later years of life, children gain a valuable sensitivity to the needs of older people.

What can parents do to give our children and our parents the best opportunities to share a close friendship?

While no one can force a friendship to develop between two other people, parents, more than anyone else, are responsible for creating an atmosphere in which a love between children and grandparents can grow.

The love that both feel for us is the strongest link between them. It is what forms the common ground upon which their relationship is

built. Thus, if anyone can smooth the way to friendship, and build bridges between the two in rough times, parents can.

Encourage relationships

Here are some suggestions for ways to encourage the growth of a loving relationship between your children and their grandparents.

Time

The most important way we can help our children get to know their grandparents is to let them spend time with them—time to visit together with you, and time for them to spend together alone.

If frequent visits are impossible, phone calls and letters can help to keep the relationship alive and make the visits themselves less awkward.

A relaxed attitude

Every time Grandma stops by our house, she has a little something for each of the children. I used to worry that this wasn't good for them because they came to expect that there would always be something for them when she came.

I was afraid they would not appreciate the value of her visit itself. I also got annoyed at the buildup of clutter since anything that came from Grandma was impossible for them to part with.

I mentioned this to Grandma, and she obligingly switched to bringing some of her blueberry muffins the next few times she came instead of the usual little toys.

Then I realized I had been wrong. She needed to bring something every time she came. This is her way of putting excitement and magic into her relationship with my children. And my children love her, not for the things she brings, but

because of the way she loves to bring them.

Communication

Like any relationship, the one between your children and their grandparents is likely to have its rough moments.

If children are encouraged to share their feelings with their parents, it can make it easier to detect what is causing problems and work together on finding solutions.

As parents, we can try to help our children to understand their grandparents' point of view and, if possible, help them find a way to communicate their feelings to their grandparents without hurting them.

Because no two grandparents or children are alike, every relationship will be unique with its own qualities and its own problems. And there are bound to be instances where these or any other suggestions will not help.

Sometimes, though, just a little extra effort can help your children discover the magical friendship they have with their grandparents. Who knows, when you see one another through your child's loving eyes, you and your parents may even discover a deeper friendship of your own.□

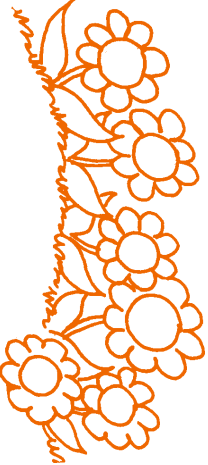









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Thank you!

June 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>Adopt-a-Shelter-Cat Month National Rose Month Potty Training Awareness Month National Safety Month Student Safety Month</p> 						
<p>4 Save the daily newspaper each year on your child's birthday to give to her when she's grown up. Pentecost</p>	<p>5 Richard Scarry's birthday. Go to the library and read one of his books!</p>	<p>6 National Hunger Awareness Day</p> 	<p>7 Wear something orange.</p>	<p>8 Find these numbers on a calendar and draw a circle around them: 7 20 13 29</p>	<p>9 Donald Duck's birthday! Sail a boat.</p> 	<p>10 Play with a ball outside.</p>
<p>11 Play hide and seek with a toy. (Hide a toy for someone to find.)</p>	<p>12 "J" is for June. Can you name five more words that start with the letter J?</p>	<p>13 What is the weather like today? Go outside and talk about it. What words would you use to describe how "outside" feels today?</p>	<p>14 Flag Day. Fly the flag!</p> 	<p>15 Put several toys in a bag. Pull them out one at a time. Can you tell what they are before you see them?</p>	<p>16 Mark on this calendar each day when it rains this month.</p>	<p>17 World Juggling Day.</p> 
<p>18 Father's Day.</p> 	<p>19 Garfield's birthday.</p> 	<p>20 Play copycat games: Make faces. Wave bye-bye. Hold up two fingers.</p>	<p>21 Summer begins!</p>	<p>22 Put up a tent to play in in the back yard.</p> 	<p>23 Take Your Dog to Work Day.</p>	<p>24 Go for a walk. Take along a paper bag and pick up litter.</p>
<p>25 Sing in the bathtub.</p> 	<p>26 Do stretching exercises.</p>	<p>27 Helen Keller's birthday.</p>	<p>28 National Handshake Day.</p> 	<p>29 Check the batteries in your smoke alarm(s).</p>	<p>30 Find five rocks.</p>	