



I'm Worried About My Grandchild

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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It's hard being a grandparent. You see we are filled with this overwhelming love for the little person and, at the same time, feel that we know exactly what that child needs.

Sometimes we might not like the parent of the child or are upset about the choices that s/he makes in their parenting. Perhaps we think that discipline is lacking (or too strict). Maybe our adult child has a partner who we think is a poor example or just plain irresponsible.

I have heard clients talk about how they believe that the grandchild suffers when the parents do not help them with their homework or attend their school activities. The grandparent then decides to take it upon themselves to show up at the school and become confused or offended when teachers and principals refuse to talk with them because the parents have advised the school that this is their wish.

Some grandparents are bothered when their grandchildren spend most of the time in front of the television or computer. They try to convince the family to go to the library, join a sports team or share an outing together instead.

Others are horrified by the way that grandchildren dress, that they don't have a curfew or that they are being left alone when they are "just too young".

The lifestyle of the parents can cause friction. Maybe the grandparents don't like "friends" who the parents have chosen or are upset with the amount of drinking that goes on. They may feel frustrated about the example that the parents are setting for the grandchildren.

Sometimes the grandparents don't like the housing or even the location that the parents have chosen for their residence. They might not think that the parents have appropriate jobs or are supporting the children in the manner they deserve.

Often grandparents try to take on the role of "parent" to the children. Now in some cases this is totally appropriate and, in fact, the parents support the idea - until they feel that something isn't going the way that they think it should.

Some grandparents who are worried about abuse or neglect find it very difficult to call *Child Protection Services* but do so anonymously because they really believe that the child is not being cared for properly. This call might lead to positive change, but, most often, an investigation results in discovery that the child's needs are being adequately met and there are no concerns.

Grandparents often threaten to apply to the Courts for Guardianship of the child. Unless there is clear evidence that the parents are not or cannot provide the basic needs of life, however, things remain the same.

You see, as grandparents we have opinions about what our grandchildren need and what is best for them. These are usually based on our own values and ideas but are usually not situations that require *Child Protection* or the Court's intervention.

And so, we are stuck with our "opinion" about what "should" happen and no power!

What can you do to make sure that your grandchildren do well?

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1. **Improve the relationship with their parents** - If you are not getting along with the parents, you might lose your opportunities to spend time with the children. You should not be the "enemy".
2. **Encourage the parents and tell them what they are doing well** - Remember when you were raising your children? There were many demanding times when you really needed someone to just offer you a few kind words.
3. **Find ways to keep in touch directly with the grandchild** - You may need to learn how to text or be willing to invest money into a telephone card so the child can call you at your expense.
4. **Honour any specific requests that the parent makes about caring for the child** - If they ask you to have the child in bed at a certain time or not fill them with too many sweets, do that. There are usually reasons why these requests are made. Honouring them shows that you respect the parent and truly do want the best for the child.
5. **Talk positively to the child** - When you "bad mouth" the parents, you put pressure on the child to "take sides". Remember these are their relatives that you are trashing!
6. **Ask if there are things that you can help with to take pressure from the parent** - Maybe you can help with the homework, transportation or even attend parent-teacher interviews when the parent is scheduled to work. Just remember that you are a surrogate - not the parent. Maybe you can help with buying the school supplies or covering the soccer fees. It is better to plan to do these things with the parent though rather than launch out on your own and end up being a target.
7. **Have a wonderful time when you are with the child** - Focus on the present. Go for a walk, play board games, watch a good movie, make popcorn. Try to give the child gifts such as teaching them skills and creating memories that they will treasure.

Yes, it can be difficult to see how your grandchild is being raised. You might want to "take over" or just "straighten the parents out". That really isn't going to help the situation. In fact, it might result in you not having contact with the child as much as you would like.

As the grandparent, you are supposed to be the wiser, mature one. Perhaps your patience, love and positive actions will actually provide a model for the parents that they will choose to copy down the road.

Remember, no matter what happens, it's all about relationships - and they can be difficult at times. Even if your grandchild's parents are the "goofiest" people in the world, your grandchild will grow up and, if you have built a good relationship with them, they will want to continue to have positive contacts with you.

If you feel that you could use some help to learn how to let go of the worries and create those healthy relationships, contact a psychologist today in order to schedule an appointment.

You are investing in the future - your future and the future of generations to come!

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