

Resolving Differences with Grandparents / Extended Family

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Most Common Issues

- Different expectations for involvement: They're less involved than you'd hoped, and/or not helping in the way you'd hoped. For example, you hoped they would babysit based on your schedule – when *you* need them. Instead, they schedule times that work for *them*.
- Advice. They may offer advice that you feel is outdated, or feel comes from a different perspective on parenting that's not in line with your values.
- Judgment. Their suggestions for improvement feel like they're judging you to be a bad parent.
- Failure to listen. It may seem they ignore your requests, or do the opposite of what you ask.
- Spoiling. Our culture implies this is part of the grandparent's job. Also, they may have regrets about ways they "failed" you as a parent, and view this as an opportunity to make up for that.

These challenges can make it difficult to maintain a relationship. But there are good reasons to do so:

Benefits of grandparents / extended family

- Love: Extended family can offer unconditional love. Because they are not involved in the logistics of the child's everyday life, they may be able to accept and celebrate the child just as he is. They don't need to make the child do chores, or scold them for undone homework.
- Safety to explore: A grandparents' home may be the first place your child sleeps without you there by their side. It lets them practice separation.
- Companionship: Grandparents may have time to slow down and just hang out with your child.
- Assistance: Some family members help out several times a week with child care and other tasks, some aren't but *are* available in times of crisis when you really need someone.
- Identity and history: Extended family can help your child feel more grounded in the world – offering a better sense of where they come from and what kind of person they may become.

Issue: Different expectations. Solution: Try to see things from their perspective

If their involvement is different than you hoped, don't assume you know why. Talking with them may reveal a variety of reasons why their expectations of themselves as grandparents differs from yours:

- They may feel like they gave many years of their lives to parenting, and feel ready for a bit of a break to do some of the other things they enjoy.
- They may want to be more involved, but have too many other commitments to make time.
- They may have anxiety about whether they can do a good job, and may hold back.
- They may be trying not to "step on your toes" and waiting to be invited to participate more.

Have a clear discussion with them about how involved they would like to be / are able to be.

Issue: Advice. Solution: Share What You Know / Believe, and Listen to what they Know

- Talk with them about the parenting choices you are making, and your reasons for doing so.
- Arm them with current information: Share articles and websites. Invite them to pediatrician's appointments or parenting classes with you. Take a baby safety class together.
- Ask their advice from time to time. They may then give less unsolicited advice at other times. Listen to them: they've parented before... they may well have wisdom you can benefit from!
- Help them feel important and included: Tell them what to do rather than what not to do.

At some point, you may need to say: "Thank you for sharing your thoughts on this. But, this is how we are choosing to parent our child, and we ask that you honor that and follow what we do."

Issue: Judgment. Solution: Assume the Best

Assume that they want the best for you and for your child(ren). They may have a different definition of what that looks like, but their heart is likely to be in the right place.

They may feel confident about the way they parented their children, so have confidence that they can do well with yours. They also can't help but remember you as a child who needed help learning how to use the potty, tie a shoe, walk to school, and learn to drive. There are times it's hard for your parents to remember that you're a grown-up and let you find your own path.

If they question your judgment in front of the child ("I don't know why your parents won't let you do this... I would let you do it"), let them know that's not acceptable. They need to show respect of you and help reinforce your authority, not diminish it. Tell them that if there's something they're really concerned about, you would like them to speak to you out of the child's hearing.

Issue: Failure to Listen. Solution: Adjust how you communicate

Sometimes when we're not being heard, it's because we're speaking a different language. Try to see the world from their perspective and think about how you might say things differently.

When possible, listen to them, and show a willingness to compromise / meet them halfway.

Issue: Spoiling / Over-Indulging. Solution: pick your battles, and enforce limits

It can be exhausting, and damaging to a relationship, to squabble over every difference. However, as the parent, you have the right to set limits on acceptable behavior, safety issues, and "spoiling".

Pick your battles. Some of the less important things you can let slide. Maybe you have a no screen time policy at your house, but your family member likes watching children's shows with your child. It's OK if your extended family does some things differently than you do. For example, when your child goes to the grocery store with grandpa, he may always get candy from the gumball machine. When you go to the store, you can say no to that, letting him know that's grandpa's special treat.

But, if grandparents say yes to something that you feel strongly about, that can make it harder for you to enforce limits. Ask for their help on this... Make sure they know what are the essential limits for you, so they can reinforce those as unbreakable rules.

Issue: Your Family vs. your partner's family. Solution: Ally with your partner

You may find that you get along fine with your family, but your in-laws make you crazy. Or vice versa! You may love the way one family interacts with your child, but hate how the other family does. Talk with your partner first to figure out what your challenges and goals are with each family, and communicate with both families as a team.

Sources

- www.empoweringparents.com/grandparents-and-parents-disagreeing-11-tips-for-both-of-you.php?&key=Calm-Parenting
- www.parents.com/parenting/dynamics/grandparents/relating-to-grandparents