

ARE YOU A 'PUSHOVER' GRANDPARENT?

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Now that we are about to become grandparents again, it has caused me to think about what our role will be in this little boy's life. Grand parenting has a wonderful set of opportunities and responsibilities all of its own. Yes, I have heard the age-old saying that, "Grandparents are there to spoil their grandkids rotten and then hand them back. Ha, ha, ha!" As much as this comment sounds funny to the grandparents, it has a sobering effect on me as an advisor on effective parenting. It creates the opportunity for major indulgence. For the short time little Johnny is in his grandparents' care he is the center of the universe and they tend to answer his every whim. This situation gives the child a mixed message.

"At Granny's place I can have anything I want and she will take me anywhere I ask. Grandfather is cool, too, because he lets me have candy whenever I go to the store. Mommy and Daddy don't let me do and eat whatever I like. Are Mommy and Daddy just being mean? Maybe they don't love me as much as my grandparents do! I want to live with my grandparents all the time because it is fun being with them!"

So what are the opportunities and responsibilities that we, as grandparents, have in relation to these precious grandchildren? The most important thing we can do is to offer our attention. This doesn't mean our grandchild has us 'captured' all day long. It merely means that this is a great opportunity to teach him something new. It might be a time to teach him new words, to tell the time or to tie his laces. It might mean teaching him to ride a bike or bake cookies. There is nothing wrong with giving our grandchildren our undivided attention. However, there has to be a balance between attending to his needs and wishes and thinking you have to do everything he asks or he won't like you anymore. It is not a popularity contest. Even little children need to understand that you need time to do stuff, too, and that they must learn to play happily on their own for short periods of time.

Grandparents not only have opportunities, but also responsibilities. There needs to be a seamless transition from one household to the other. Grandparents need to adhere to the parents' values and expectations. Since the parents are the primary caregivers, their expectations take priority. If expectations between caregivers differ, the child becomes confused and may get into playing one adult off against the other to get what they want.

Our new grandchild is being adopted and our daughter has already made some things clear to us. She says that while she is present she will deal with the discipline. We are to abide by the same corrective processes she and her husband follow. We are very happy with that arrangement. She has also stated that she does not want anyone else to talk to him about his adoptive situation. She says, and we agree, that this is their prerogative as parents. They will tell him what he wants to know at a level he can understand. As long as their requirements are made clear

at the outset, it is our duty as grandparents to follow their wishes. It is also vital that we do not create a situation where we become the 'softies' or the 'goodies' and the parents become the ogres. That is not healthy at all.

What a gift it is to become grandparents. We already have two grandchildren in New Zealand and now one here in Tennessee. We are able to Skype our little ones overseas so that we can maintain a growing relationship. We try to spend as much time with them as we can when we visit. So far I think they see us as kind and caring people. That is what we aim to be. We certainly want them to respect us and to succeed. It is our job to reiterate their parents' boundaries and expectations. Children need to understand that grandparents are not a 'pushover'. When I hear grandparents saying, "It is our job to spoil them rotten and then hand them back," I find that attitude lacking respect for the parents and counter-productive to how they are being raised.

You are not doing anyone a favor by taking this stand. Our responsibility as grandparents is to help our grandchildren reach the same goals as their parents have for them – to be God-loving, respectful, contributing, positive members of the community around them.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.