

Grandparenting... Getting It Right



Being a grandparent is a special role, but it can also be a challenge.

Woman's Weekly's

counsellor Keren Smedley answers some of your letters on the subject

My mother isn't helping

Q I've just separated from my husband. It's been difficult for us all. My mother recently had my three children round for tea and told them that she knew that life must be hard for them and that their parents had let them down, and that she was there to support them. I'm so angry, I don't know what to say.

A I understand your mother's hurting because of your break-up but that doesn't excuse her behaviour. We ask our parents to embrace our partners and them, if it doesn't work out, we ask them to let them go. This, of course, isn't that easy, as they have built their own relationship. That said, all her hurt should remain with her and shared with you if she wants - but not your children. They're already having to adapt to a difficult and painful situation and they need to see stress supporting you, not criticising you and your ex's ability to parent. We all know that discussions born of anger go badly, so take a little time to think through what you're going to say in a rational manner. Practise with a friend so you're clear. Then talk to your mother, acknowledge her hurt and then tell her how you feel and that her words were not acceptable.

Should I look after my grandchild?

Q My daughter is coming to the end of her maternity, leave and needs to go back to work. She and her husband work hard but will still struggle to pay for childcare. I'm 62 and have been talking about retiring for a while but I'm not sure I'm really ready. She's asked me if I can go part-time and do two days' childcare. Should I?

A What do you want to do? It's really important that you have a long, hard think about this and make a decision based on what will be good for you. One way of thinking about this is to imagine yourself in five years' time, when your grandchild goes to school. What would fulfil you most and therefore make you the best grandparent? Only you will know. What I do know is that if you do something you resent, it won't be good for any of you. Once you know, explain this to your daughter and help her to find the best childcare for your grandchild.

Why can't I be called Granny?

Q I've been married to my husband for 25 years. His children were six and eight when we married and have been very involved. My stepdaughter and her partner are expecting a baby. We had a conversation about names for the grandparents. When I said that I'd like to be called Granny, there was a silence and they said I'd be Jane because I'm not a biological grandparent. I feel so hurt.

A I'm sorry, that must have been difficult. I don't expect they will have two grandmothers meant to hurt you. They stated what is a fact. However painful, the reality is that the child will have two grandmothers. But they may not have thought



I'm at their beck and call

Q I love my children and grandchildren but I also want my own life. My son and daughter call on me whenever things go wrong with their childcare arrangements and expect me to just drop everything and run.

A I wonder why that is? It's very easy for parents to offer to do anything at any time and then find their children believe them. I know it can be hard to say no, but, if you feel you're being taken advantage of, then you need to discuss this with them. If you don't, you'll become resentful and it will cause difficulties all round. Find a time when all is going well and sit down with your children and their partners and explain to them that while, of course, you're happy to be there in an emergency, that's different from being available at any moment of the day or night.

Why are we being left out?

Q My son and daughter-in-law have just had their first baby. It's very exciting but I feel left out. Her mother has been there every day while we've been allowed to visit just once. I know she wants her mother around but we are grandparents too.

A I understand how difficult this must feel but I'd like you to think back to when you had your first child. Who did you want to be around you and who did you call for advice? My hunch is it was your mother and not your mother-in-law. That said, things shift and, as she becomes more confident, your daughter-in-law will be looking for something else from a grandmother. Think of what you can offer which will be good for them all and, in time, I think you'll find yourself fully involved.

My in-laws don't stick to our rules

Q My young children have just come back from a weekend with their grandparents (my in-laws). They had a great time, which is good. However, they were allowed to do things we don't approve of, such as watching some unsuitable TV, eating sweets between meals and staying up much too late. My in-laws know our rules. I don't want the children to go to his parents again, but my husband says I'm being ridiculous.

A I'm not surprised that you're a bit fed up with them, but it does sound like something of an overreaction. Grandparents, as I'm sure you know, love to spoil their grandchildren and to offer treats. But doing this by 'breaking the rules' is, I agree, not acceptable. Reiterate what you - as parents - want with your in-laws so that they're absolutely clear about the boundaries, and ask them to make sure they keep to these. Do it gently, though, and maybe suggest to other things they can provide as a treat so that they feel they are still able to offer something special.

through that you're a significant other in their lives and will be in their child's life too. Tell your stepdaughter that you know you're not a blood relation but you have been an important person for most of her life. Having had that conversation, you can then think of a name together that best fits your role, something that feels right to you all.