

Parenting 24+ Series

Cooperative Parenting with Grandparents



Department of Health

Online Version



How can parenting be cooperative between generations?

When grandparents are involved in childcare, it is necessary for parents to maintain good communication with the elderly in achieving consistent and effective parenting.

1. Understand each other

*** Try to understand the grandparents from their point of view. Then explain your ideas calmly.**

"Grandma is not willing to throw away expired foods and she has not bought new clothes for years either. When Grandma was young, she had suffered hardships during wartime. And she has learned to practise thrift since then."

Just a few days expired. I can still eat it.



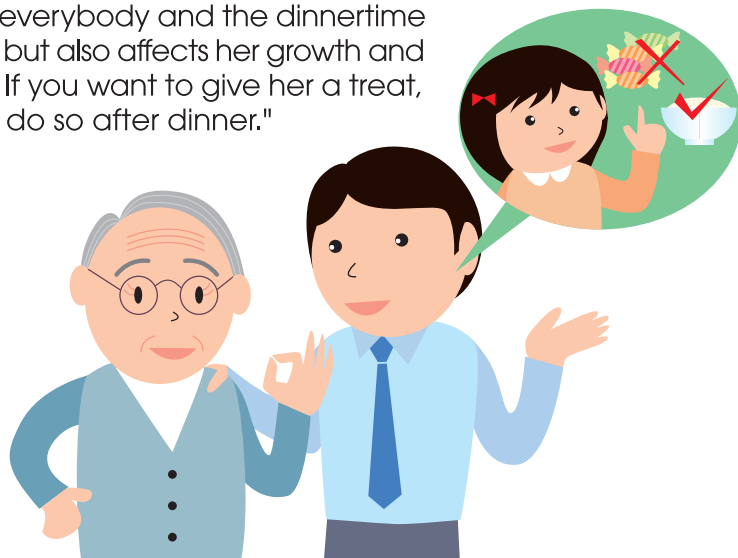
- **Different generations may be diverse in culture and experience.** So it is not surprising for you and the elderly to have different views and practices, particularly in parenting approach.
 - Traditionally, caregivers in a family used to perform different roles - one as the 'good guy' or the benevolent one, and the other as the 'bad guy' or the mean one in teaching their children.
 - Current parenting practices stress on consistent rules and plans to be followed through by all caregivers.
- The elderly may resist parenting strategies that are new to them.
- Changing the deep-rooted practices and habits of the elderly is never easy (the same as in changing our own). Patience and repeatedly explaining to them do help.

2. Open and harmonious communication

- * The simplest way to let others understand our expectations and thoughts is to tell them directly. How to say it also counts.

"Toni loves candies so grandpa always buys for her. Sometimes, Toni's appetite may be upset after eating too many candies. Her parents blame grandpa for using candies to win his grandchild over. However, grandpa only thinks that satisfying Toni's needs is a way to show his love to her."

- Misunderstandings and conflicts between parents and grandparents often stem from a lack of communication.
- Assuming your mind is well read by others without explanation may be wishful thinking.
- From the above scenario, if Toni's parents want to gain grandpa's cooperation, they should try to explain to grandpa, "Toni will lose appetite after eating candies. This not only upsets everybody and the dinnertime routine but also affects her growth and health. If you want to give her a treat, please do so after dinner."

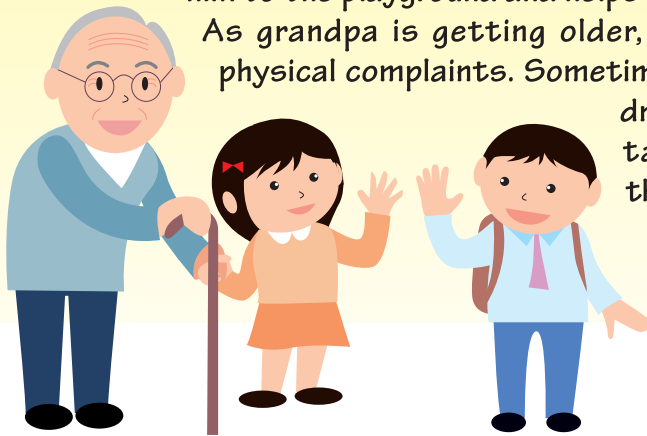


3. Appreciate and respect each other

- * Try to express your appreciation in words supported with actions.

"Grandpa is very caring. He volunteers to look after the grandchild for his busy daughter and son-in-law. Apart from taking the child to and from school everyday, he also takes him to the playground and helps in schoolwork.

As grandpa is getting older, he has more physical complaints. Sometimes his energy drains off when taking care of the active child."



- It costs old people much energy in looking after children. We should appreciate their contributions and efforts no matter how they discipline the children.
- Try to express your appreciation, for example, "Thanks for taking care of Yettie for me today. You have really done me a big favour!" "We really love your cooking."
- The elderly also like appreciations in action. For example, you can take them to restaurants, buy them small gifts, chat with them or join in their favourite activities sometimes.
- It takes two to tango. If you appreciate the elderly and pay them respect, they will treat you the same in return.

4. Consistency in behaviour management

- * Set ground rules with grandparents and follow through together. Communicate and involve them more in discussing the management plan.



"Wylie likes to watch TV and doesn't do his homework. His parents have set the rule of finishing homework first before having 30-minutes' TV time. However, knowing that granny yields to him easily, Wylie always whines for TV when his parents are not around."

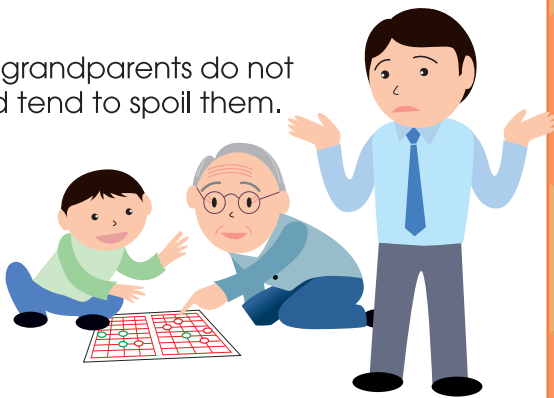
- Effective behaviour management requires **consistency** among all caregivers.
 - * Hold a family meeting.
 - * Set up ground rules.
 - * Make sure everyone understands clearly the approaches and steps for handling different situations and carry out together.
 - * Parents can **use the parenting strategies in front of the grandparents** to show them how.
- With repeated observation, grandparents may learn the skills gradually.
- If grandparents do not act according to the rules, parents can **calmly explain to them** the possible consequences and remind them of the set rules.
- Parents can also **encourage grandparents to learn more about child behaviour management** such as by attending parenting workshops with them or leaving related materials at a place for their easy access.

Grandparents have valuable contributions to the family and deserve our appreciation. They are experienced in childcare and bound to dote on their grandchildren. With them caring for our children, we can be spared of the doubts over spending money to hire an unfamiliar baby-sitter.

Q and A

1. My parents only spend time in playing with my children but do not bother to discipline them. What should I do?

- Many parents think that grandparents do not set limits on children and tend to spoil them.
- Parents can **explain behaviour management principles** and the rationale behind to grandparents.
- **Involve** grandparents and children **in setting the rules** to enhance their sense of participation and responsibility in rule keeping.
- **Grandparents can also be invited to monitor** the rule following behaviour of children.
- If grandparents do not keep to the rules, parents can **calmly explain** to them the possible consequences of what they did, and then **remind** both grandparents and children to observe the rules set together.



2. I teach my children not to litter but Grandma always does so. How should I explain to my children?

You can try telling your children in this way, "We should not litter. Everyone is responsible to keep the place clean. Maybe when Grandma was young, no one told her that littering was wrong. It's difficult for her to change now as she has acquired this bad habit over a long time. Next time, you can remind her politely and help her put the rubbish into the bin. Let's **set a good example** for her, shall we?"

3. My parents are very stubborn. When I explain the behaviour management strategies to them, they just don't bother to listen. What should I do?

- Our mode of thinking and behaviours being influenced by our personality and experience will develop into habits over time. The more established the habits, the more difficult they are to break.
- If we propose some new strategies and ideas to the elderly, we need to **explain repeatedly** to make sure they understand and to **give them more time to accept**.
- We can also:
 - * put parenting pamphlets, books or related news clippings at a place for their easy access.
 - * invite them to watch TV shows on parenting with you.
 - * encourage them to attend parenting workshops run in the Maternal and Child Health Centres.
- If we hold a positive and **friendly attitude**, with more **tolerance and patience**, our new ideas would be accepted by them sooner or later.

4. My in-law and I are in discord. I don't know how to deal with it.

- It is normal for individuals to have their own thoughts and viewpoints.
- When the viewpoints between the parties are diverse, it is not easy to reach consensus even with active effort to communicate. In that case, we should learn to **relax** and let go.
- To avoid trapping in never-ending arguments, try to **look at the matter from the perspective of an elderly** and accept the fact that you have difference in thinking.
- Even though you cannot communicate well with them, **at least get on with them in a polite and modest manner**.



- **Talking to friends** or engaging in some **relaxing activities** can relieve your stress.
- If the problem does not go away and even gets worse, **seek help from the professionals** such as a social worker.

5. My partner always has fights with my parents over our child, how can I help?

- If your partner always has conflicts with your parents over child discipline, it may be quite annoying and you may wish to stay out of the matter.
- Their conflicts are a family matter.
- Find an appropriate time to talk with the elderly and your partner separately.
- Be a mediator and promote mutual understanding by **helping them view the matter objectively** and **appreciate** each other.
- Apart from mediating, you can **show your concern** and understanding by **listening** to them in a non-judgemental manner and give them support.
- Your caring attitude and attentive listening can help relieve their emotions and facilitate calm discussion.

6. If I have conflicts with my in-law but my husband does not take side with me, what should I do?

- Try to **think of your position** if the conflicts were to happen between your partner and your parents.
- Requesting your partner to take side with you against the elderly cannot solve the problem. It would only place your partner in a dilemma.
- If there is any conflict, the practical way is to **discuss the matter calmly** and find a solution together.
- Treat your partner as **your listener but never an ally in conflict**.



Family Health Service

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