



Grandparents *Raising* Grandchildren


THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
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Moving Your Grandchild Into Your Home

Raising your grandchild can be both rewarding and challenging. The transition to this new relationship can be stressful for the entire family. While your grandchildren are getting used to a new home and caregiver, you must readjust to the responsibilities of parenting. The adjustment will take time and patience on everybody's part. But with some planning and a lot of understanding, you can adapt to the challenges of raising your grandchildren. Some of the most common adjustment problems are discussed below, along with suggestions for making the adjustment easier.

Moving Your Grandchild into Your Home

Moving to a new home brings a variety of emotions and feelings for any child. Like adults, children grieve for the people, places and things they are leaving behind. For many children, moving into their grandparent's house is complicated by other stresses, such as the loss of regular contact with a parent.

Don't be surprised if your grandchildren feel sadness during the transition to your home. Treating your grandchild's feelings with sensitivity will help make the adjustment a little easier. Keep in mind that children of different ages will need different kinds of support to deal with this transition.

Young children

(Infants to 5-year-olds)

Many adults mistakenly believe that young children adjust to changes easily because they don't understand what is happening. But researchers studying the brain have found that even very young children feel stress

during major transitions, such as moving. Even if they can't tell you what they feel, your young grandchildren pick up on your stress and anxiety. Some extra time spent with you every day can help reassure them that their world is safe.

Also remember that young children need routines to help them feel secure. Try to make their world predictable. Keep familiar toys or books nearby. Stick to a schedule for meals and bedtimes. Set up a few clear,

age-appropriate rules for their behavior, and enforce those rules consistently. And be patient — your grandchildren will need time to learn the rules of their new home.

Elementary-School Children

(6- to 12-year-olds)

School-age children are old enough to understand that moving means leaving things behind. They may be upset about losing friends and worried about finding new ones. Some school-age children are excited during the move, but feel stress a month



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or so later, when they realize how much their lives have changed.

Teenagers

(13-year-olds and up)

Teens are able to understand the move better than younger children. This may lead them to have stronger feelings of anger or grief. Give them your attention to express these feelings. Teens also rely on friends to help them adjust to changes. It's important to help them find new friends and maintain contact with old ones.



What can you do?

Although it is natural for children to need time to adjust, there are things you can do to help them cope with the changes in their lives.

Give extra time and attention, especially to younger children. Plan special time where you sit and talk to each other, without the television or other distractions. But you don't always have to discuss the changes in their lives. Plan fun things to do together as well.

Involve children in the moving process. School-age children and teens can help make lists and finish up the packing. Even young children can help with simple tasks. Let children help decide how to decorate their new room. Giving them some control makes adjusting to the move easier.

Set up a routine. Routines and schedules help children feel more secure and comfortable. Set up routines for mealtimes, bedtimes, and getting ready in the morning. Do things in the same order every day. Come up with a special ritual that you and your grandchildren can share, such as reading together before bed.

Help children find things to do. Get them involved in sports activities. Find some friends in the neighborhood they can play with. Take them to visit their new school or child care program before they start.

Recognize your grandchildren's feelings. Listen without getting upset or lecturing them. Let them know that you understand how hard these changes are. Encourage them to share their feelings, both good and bad. Read children's books to start a discussion about feelings with young children.



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Set and enforce a few rules. Children feel more secure when they know what is expected of them. Make a few clear rules for children's behavior, and enforce them every time they are broken. Don't let misbehavior "slide" because you're afraid of hurting their feelings. If you don't enforce the rules, it will be harder to teach children how to behave later. But remember that children can't remember too many rules, so keep them simple. (See *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Disciplining Your Grandchild* for more help with setting and enforcing rules.)

Give children time and space. Every child adjusts at his or her own pace. Don't be surprised if children aren't cheerful right away. Some children may seem angry or withdrawn. Others may go back to behaviors they had outgrown, such as bed-wetting or thumb-sucking. Be patient — adjusting to change takes time.

Helping Around the House

One way to help children learn responsibility is to find ways for them to help around the house. From a very young age, children can help out with specific jobs or chores. These chores will help you get things done around the house. And doing chores helps children recognize that they are an important part of the household. Giving children a chance to feel useful can also boost their self-esteem.

What kinds of chores are appropriate for your grandchildren? Young children can help out with simple tasks. Putting away their toys, carrying their clean laundry to their room, and helping set the table are things a 3- or 4-year-old can manage easily. 5- and 6-year-olds can be in charge of setting and clearing the table, emptying the wastebaskets, running the vacuum cleaner, and feeding pets. Older children and teens can help with many of the things that adults do (such as laundry, dusting, cleaning the bathrooms, and walking the dog).



Moving Your Grandchild Into Your Home

As children get older, you can also begin teaching them how to do things like ironing, mowing the grass, and cooking. Make sure you emphasize safety first!

Making It Feel like Their Home

Children need to feel like they belong. One way to make them feel at home is to carve out personal space where they can keep their special belongings. Even if space in your home is limited, it's important to set aside a specific space just for your grandchild.

If grandchildren have their own rooms, let them help decorate the room. Allow them to decide what pictures to hang or to choose some colorful rugs. If grandchildren don't have their own bedroom, be sure that your house becomes their home in other ways. Find a special place to keep their toys, or let them choose new sheets for their beds. Consider hanging children's

artwork on the refrigerator, and put up photographs that include them.

Children need places where they can have some privacy. If they don't have their own room, you may need to be creative in defining "private space." Use dividers to set up a small private area in a bigger room. Set up a schedule so they can be alone in certain areas at certain times of the day. If grandchildren are sharing a bedroom, consider allowing the older child to stay up a little later. Spend some one-to-one time with each child before bed.

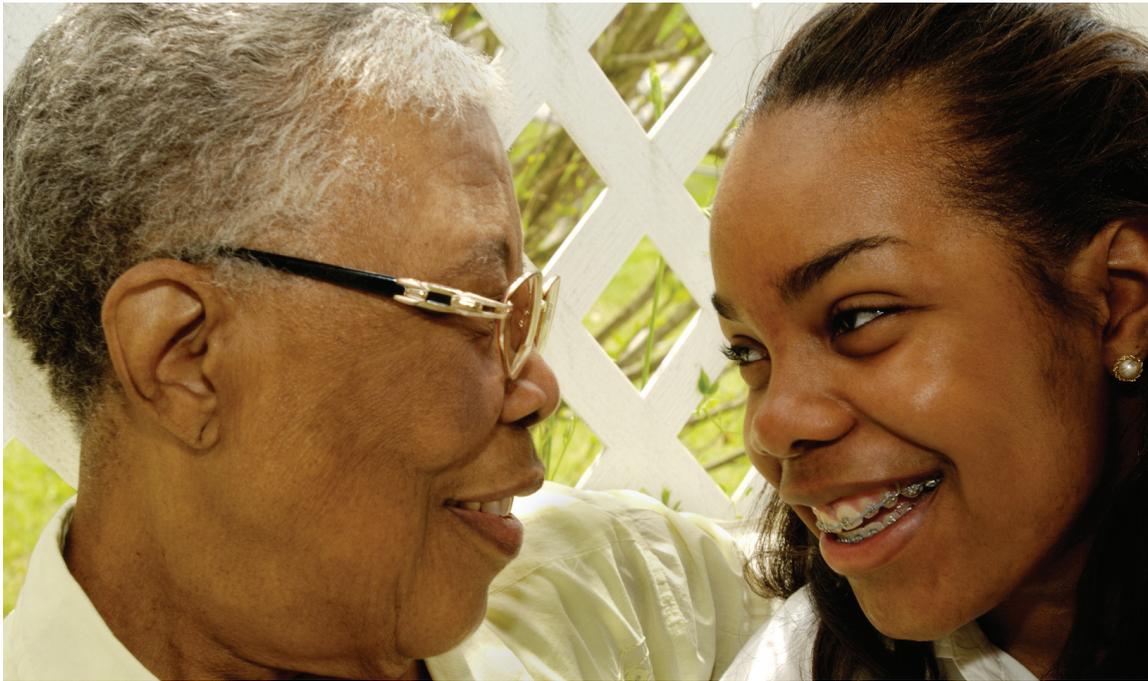
Making your grandchildren feel like a part of your home will reassure them that their living situation is stable. Whatever your space limitations, make sure your grandchildren feel like your home is their home too!



Page 4



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What Should Grandchildren Call You?

Some grandparents who are raising their grandchildren don't know what the children should call them. Many grandchildren already have a favorite name for their grandparents before they move in. If you've always been "Nana" or "Papa," it's fine to keep using that name. Help your grandchildren understand that there are many different kinds of families, and other children also live with their grandparents.

Some very young children might begin calling you "mom" and "dad" because they hear other children using those names for their caregivers. If you feel comfortable with this, don't worry about it. If it makes you uncomfortable, gently remind your grandchild that you are Granny. If your grandchild has regular contact with his mother or father, you may need to remind him who "mom" or "dad" is. Show him photos, and talk about what he does with his parents. (For more tips on parent-child

relationships, see *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Helping Grandchildren Stay in Contact with their Parents.*)

Above all, don't let the name question worry you. Choose whatever works best for both you and your grandchild.

In Summary

Although bringing grandchildren into your home brings new challenges, it can also be very rewarding. You will get to have experiences that most grandparents don't have, such as getting to see them when they first wake up and watching them grow and develop. With time, patience, and caring, you can adjust to your new role and help your grandchildren feel comfortable in their new home.



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