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Moving Your Grandchildren into Your Home

Diane Bales, Professor, Extension Human Development Specialist, and Child Life Program Director

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Raising your grandchildren 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 new rules, you must readjust to the responsibilities of parenting. The adjustment will take time and patience on everybody's part. But with some planning, patience, and a lot of understanding, you can overcome the challenges of raising your grandchildren. Some of the most common challenges are discussed below, along with suggestions for making the adjustment process easier for the whole family.

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. Your grandchildren's move into your house also may be complicated by other stresses, such as the loss of regular contact with a parent.

Don't be surprised if your grandchildren express sadness, anger, anxiety, or other negative feelings during the transition to your home. Treating your grandchildren'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 don't have the

words to explain what they feel, your young grandchildren pick up on your stress and anxiety. Spending some extra time with you every day can help reassure them that their world is safe and you are there to take care of them.

Also remember that young children need routines to help them feel secure. Try to make their world predictable. Keep familiar toys and books nearby and read familiar stories regularly. If your child has a blanket or other comfort item, make sure to bring it to your house. Stick to a schedule for meals and bedtimes. Set up a few clear, age-appropriate rules for behavior, and enforce those rules consistently. And be patient; remember that children will need time to learn the rules of their new home.

Elementary-School-Age 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 or leaving their familiar school, and may worry about finding new friends or getting to know a new teacher and class. Some school-age children are excited during the move, but feel stress a few weeks later, when they start to realize how much their lives have changed.

Teenagers (13-year-olds and up)

Teens are able to better understand the move, and the reasons why they are living with their grandparents, than are younger children. Because of this, they may express stronger feelings of anger or grief than their younger siblings. Give them your attention. Allow them to express these feelings. Empathize when appropriate. 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. Help them problem-solve ways to meet new people and get comfortable in their new school and neighborhood.

What Can Grandparents Do?

Although it is natural for children to need time to adjust, there are some things you can do to help them cope with the changes that come with moving to their grandparents' home.

Give them extra time and attention, especially to younger children. Plan special times where you sit and talk to each other or read together, without smartphones or other distractions. Plan fun things to do together, both inside and outside your home. Even simple activities like a visit to a local park can give you time to connect with your grandchildren.

Involve children in the moving process. School-age children and teens can help make lists and finish the packing. Even young children can help with simple tasks, like putting their toys in a box. Let your grandchildren have a say in decorating their new room, like choosing new sheets or helping decide what color to paint the walls. Giving them some control may make adjusting to the move easier.

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

Set and enforce a few rules. Children feel more secure when they know what is expected of them. Make a few clear rules 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 won't remember too many rules, so keep them simple. (See Extension publication [C 1284, *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Disciplining Your Grandchildren*](#) for more help with setting and enforcing rules.)

Help children find things to do. Get them involved in sports, art, dance, or other out-of-school activities that interest them. Find some friends in the neighborhood they can play with. Take them to visit their new school or child care program before they start. Visit a playground or park to give them time to run around.

Notice and respond to your grandchildren's feelings. Pay attention to little cues that they are unhappy, anxious, or overwhelmed. Ask how they are feeling and 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. Encourage older children and teens to find ways to express their feelings, such as writing in a journal or drawing pictures. Read children's books to start a discussion about feelings with young children.

Give children time and space. Every child adjusts at his or her own pace. Don't be surprised if your grandchildren aren't cheerful right away. If you have more than one grandchild moving into your home, avoid comparing them. Some children may seem to adjust well. Others may act angry or withdrawn. Others may go back to behaviors they had outgrown, such as bed-wetting or thumb-sucking. Be patient and remember that 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 with specific jobs or chores. Doing chores helps children recognize that they are an important part of the household, while also helping you get things done. Giving children a chance to be useful also can boost their self-esteem.

What kinds of chores are appropriate for your grandchildren? Young children can help with simple tasks, such as putting away their toys, carrying their clean laundry to their room, and helping set the table. Five- and 6-year-olds can be in charge of setting and clearing the table, loading the dishwasher, 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.

As children get older, you can begin teaching them how to do things like ironing, mowing the grass, cooking, and fixing things around the house. These activities will help them learn important life skills that they will use as they grow up. 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 each grandchild.

If grandchildren have their own rooms, let them help decorate their own 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. Set up 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 display 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 of different ages are sharing a bedroom, consider allowing the older child to stay up a little later to have a little private time. 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.

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, or other relatives, or friends.

Some very young children might begin calling you "mom" and "dad" because they hear other children using those names for their parents. 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 young grandchildren have regular contact with their parents, you may need to remind them who "mom" or "dad" is. Show them photos and talk about what they do with their parents. (For more tips on parent-child relationships, see [C 1284-02, *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*](#).)

[Helping Grandchildren Stay in Contact with their Parents.](#)) Above all, don't let the name question worry you. Choose whatever name works best for both you and your grandchildren.

In Summary

Although bringing grandchildren into your home brings new challenges, it also can be very rewarding. You will get to have experiences with your grandchildren that most grandparents don't have, such as getting to see them when they first wake up and watching their excitement as they learn something new. 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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