

Polk/Burnett Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Newsletter



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The Importance of Communication with Grandchildren

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Special points of interest:

Tips on effectively communicating with your grandchildren.

Open communication is taking the time to listen, explaining facts in simple and honest ways, and clearly expressing your thoughts and feelings.

Open communication can help make life changes easier for a child. It can help children understand that behaviors go along with thoughts and feelings.

Helping your grandchild communicate.

Open communication between you and your grandchild is essential. If possible, talk honestly and openly with your grandchildren in a way that they will understand. Having someone they trust to talk with, and get answers from, helps children feel safe and understood.

Although it may be out of your control, having your grandchild stay in touch with his or her parent can be helpful, in some situations. Staying in touch on a regular basis with their parents can be reassuring and comforting to your grandchildren. Not knowing when or if they will hear from their parents is very hard for children.



How much should you tell young children?

Children can read people's emotions by what they hear, see, and feel. They hear adults talking or piece together bits of information. Often they understand more than adults think they do.

The following tips may help you decide what to tell your grandchildren about a particular situation, but keep in mind their age and developmental skills:

- **Avoid telling the child too much.** Too much information may be confusing, scary, and overwhelming for the child. Some children are simply too young to understand the whole story.
- **Avoid telling the child too little or nothing at all.** Kids are smart and will pick up tidbits about their situation, even if the details are not discussed openly. If they learn what's going on from someone else, they could feel hurt, deceived and confused.
- **Never twist the facts or lie to the child.** Even very young children know the difference between the truth and a lie. Some people may twist the facts in an effort to protect the child, but this often backfires. The best strategy is to be honest with your grandchildren, at their level of understanding. Your grandchildren will learn the importance of trust and honesty in relationships.

Sources:

Through the eyes of a child: Grandparents raising grandchildren; The Importance of Open Communication, B3786, University of Wisconsin-Extension

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Communication and language development of children at different ages.

Very young children (**birth to 6 months**) recognize familiar voices, facial expressions and smiles. They begin to remember sounds and their meanings, especially their own name.

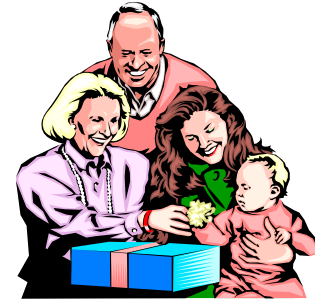
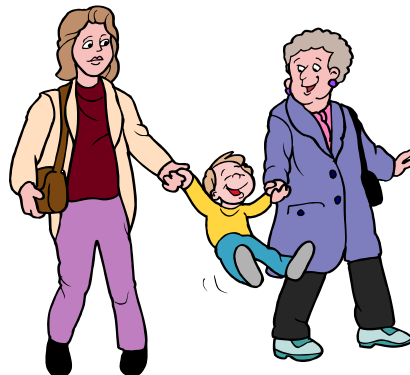
One to two years, children begin speaking their first words and can understand many words, even more than they can say. They point to pictures in books. At two years they begin two-word sentences and will gesture less and name more.

Two to three years, child's vocabulary grows, sentences include combinations of objects and action words. Children understand that many different words can describe the same thing. Children enjoy and remember hearing or reading stories.

Four to five years, children's sentences are made up of 4-5 words and their comprehension is increasing. Children often misunderstand the complicated language of adults.

Five to seven years, children's sentences involve more words and they are able to put several thoughts into sentences that make sense. Children begin to respond to what other people say in conversations. They often engage in private conversations with themselves. Children can tell stories.

Seven to eight years, children learn that one word can have several meanings. They begin to understand language rules. Children are learning to write to communicate their thoughts.



Communication strategies for talking with your grandchildren.

- Be aware of conversations your grandchild may overhear and how you speak of the parent.
- Talking about your feelings can show your grandchildren how to express their feelings. For example, when your grandchild is crying you might say, "It looks like something is upsetting you. Are you feeling sad?"
- Children may use play as a way to show their feelings. Taking time to play with your grandchild and listening to what is being said during play may give you some insight into their thoughts and feelings.
- For an older grandchild, conversations may be easiest in places that are less threatening (such as the car). This may give your grandchild the space needed to feel comfortable talking with you.

Websites:

UW-Extension grandparenting website;
www.uwex.edu/relationships/

"Talking with Kids about Tough Issues", an initiative by Children Now and the Kaiser Family Foundation;
www.talkingwithkids.org