

# Polk/Burnett Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Newsletter



Edited and published quarterly by:  
Marilyn Kooiker, Burnett County Family Living Agent and  
Gail Peavey, Polk County Family Living Agent

## Grandchildren's Contact with Their Parents

### Inside this issue:

- *Are face-to-face parent/child contacts in the best interest of the child?*
- *Tips for positive parent-child contact*

### Special points of interest:

Children benefit most when contact is positive, predictable, and consistent.

If the parent cannot visit, help your grandchild understand why.

Grandparents can help grandchildren adjust to their change in life by being there, listening to feelings, and letting them know they love them.

Grandparents take on expanded grandparenting roles when the parents can no longer care for their children. Many parents, however, have difficulty giving up the responsibility of raising their children.

Maintaining positive contact with parents may help grandchildren adjust to the changes in their lives. When a parent visits a child who is being reared by the grandparent, roles are reversed. Grandparents now are the primary caregivers and are responsible for making daily decisions regarding the child's life.

A visit from a parent may bring up many different feelings for grandparents. They may remember a past history of abuse against the child, the parent's drug habits, or other harmful behaviors. Grandparents may believe the child will be upset by the return of the parent or that the parents cause too much confusion in the child's life. It is important to recognize and deal with one's own feelings before the visit, since grandchildren will take these cues when interacting with a parent.

Some parents may not show up for a visitation. Grandparents can help the children understand that the parent may not come by making a simple explanation of what may have happened.

Explanations will vary based on the ages of the children. A 4-year-old won't understand as much as a 15-year-old. For young children, one might say something like

"Sometimes, your mom doesn't do what she says she is going to. I know you're upset and I'm sad, too."

If children seem upset, encourage them to express their feelings. Comfort grandchildren by saying, "That must have made you feel angry and disappointed." Try to point out ways the parent has shown that she cares, such as calling or sending cards.

Children should be encouraged to talk to the parent about their disappointment. The parent may not know they are upset unless they say so.

### Factors to Consider Before Visits

**In some situations, parent-child contact may not be in the child's best interest.**

Parents who are depressed may not interact or communicate with the child the way they could if they were emotionally healthy.

Some parents show up to visit the child and are high or using drugs. This situation is not good for the child, and the visit should be stopped.

### **The meeting time and location.**

When deciding meeting times, location, and frequency, many factors, including the child's age, relationship with the parent, and the child's reaction to previous contact must be considered. For an infant, one visit every two months is not frequent enough to maintain a relationship.

**Websites:**

[http://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/cyf\\_pubs.php](http://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/cyf_pubs.php)

<http://www.uwex.edu/relationships>

*Reviewed by Mary Brintnall-Peterson, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Program Specialist in Aging.*

*For more information on grandparenting issues contact:*

Marilyn Kooiker  
Burnett County Family  
Living Agent  
7410 County Rd. K,  
#107  
Siren, WI 54872  
(715) 349-2151  
Marilyn.Kooiker@ces.  
uwex.edu

Gail Peavey  
Polk County Family  
Living Agent  
100 Polk Plaza, Ste 210  
Balsam Lake WI 54810  
(715) 485-8600  
Gail.Peavey@ces.uwex.  
edu

Give the child some control over the visit. For example, they may want to choose whether the visit takes place on Saturday or Sunday. Older children may want to help decide where the visit will take place. Help grandchildren come up with things they can talk about with their parent, such as school activities, sports, or hobbies.

**How the child feels about a parent visit.**

Children have different feelings about seeing their parents. Infants may not know the parent if there has been no contact for a long time. Sometimes children are very excited to see their parents and feel good about the visits. In other cases, a child may not want to see the parent at all. Grandparents need to think carefully about the reasons for a child's feelings and what is best for the child.

**Tips for Smooth Visits**

Visits can be a stressful time for everyone. If possible, it is a good idea to make the visits a part of the child's routine. Here are some ways to help visits with parents go smoothly.

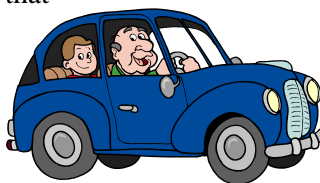
**Be as flexible as possible with schedules.**

Plan ahead of time where the visits will take place and who's responsible for transporting the child. Provide parents notice of changes in schedules.

**Treat the parent with respect.**

Be on time. Try not to discuss conflicts with the parents in front of the children. Don't use the children to relay messages to the parent.

Visits from the parent need to be as undistruptive as possible. As the child needs every bond strengthened and maintained, grandparents and parents must have an agreement that every relationship will be supported and that each will do what is best for the child.

**Maintain open communication lines with your grandchildren's parent.**

Discuss rules so discipline strategies can be consistent. Let the parent know what their children are doing in school and with friends. Share current addresses, home, and work phone numbers.

**Don't question grandchildren's loyalty.**

Don't make children feel guilty about enjoying the time they spend with their parent. Help children feel safe and comfortable. It is necessary to accept reality and not be jealous when the children express attachment and love to one or the other. Both relationships are desirable.

**When a Parent Can't Visit**

For some children, parental visits never happen. In some cases, laws determine whether parents can visit and what restrictions are placed on the visit. Parents may not be able to visit at all if they have abused the child or are in prison. Your grandchildren may ask why they don't get to see their mom. Being honest with the children is usually best, but what you tell them depends on their age.

**Alternatives to Visits**

If face-to-face contact is not possible, there are other ways of helping children stay in contact with their parents in positive ways, such as phone calls, letters, drawing pictures, videos, and taping the parent reading a favorite book.

**Sources:**

*Through the eyes of a child:  
Grandparents raising grandchildren;  
Children's Contact with Their Parents,  
University of Wisconsin-Extension*

*Grandparents Raising Grandchildren:  
Helping Grandchildren Stay in Contact  
with Parents, University of Georgia  
Cooperative Extension, June, 2003*