

News Release

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Teenagers need their grandparents

Never doubt for a minute your influence on your teenage grandchildren. Healthy connections with adults are the single most important factor in helping teens develop into successful adults, says Mary Brintnall-Peterson, UW-Extension program specialist in aging.

The following ideas to help grandparents strengthen their relationships with teenage grandchildren come from a Penn State Cooperative Extension publication called "Ideas for Intergenerational Living" (Nov. 2004).

When your teenage grandchild messes up, use the situation to help your grandchild learn something. Teach teens how to make amends ("So you took something that wasn't yours. How will you return it or repay the person?") The point is to help your grandchild learn a better way of doing things, and not to hurt her through angry words or actions.

Tell your grandchildren what's good about them, and tell them often. It may be hard to find good things to say about moody 14-year-olds, but you can do it. Find out what makes your grandchild unique, and praise her over and over for it. Your words of praise are very powerful, even if the only response you get is a shrug. You can be sure she heard you, so keep it up.

Teens are going to push, complain, whine, and even try to get around your rules. Don't give up. Know your rules and enforce them consistently. Be predictable. When you are predictable, your grandchildren can trust you. Allow them the opportunity to make choices. Then, when they keep agreements, make good choices, and honor rules, congratulate them for being responsible.

When your teenage grandchild says, "I want to tell you something," it is time to give him your undivided attention. To show that you are listening, make eye contact, nod your head, and wait until he is finished to respond. The great thing is, when you hear him out, his ability to listen to you will also increase.

Show respect to your grandchildren. Acknowledge their feelings, their ideas, and even their complaints. Teens will learn to show respect to you from the way you show respect to them.

Teens who know they have a community of support--friends, teachers, parents, grandparents, and other adults--have more fun and success. Encourage their interests and help them find positive ways to take part with others. Get to know their friends.

It takes time to build solid relationships. You are helping to shape the life of another human being, so stay with it. Continue to build this relationship with your teenage grandchild and the future will be brighter for you both.

While working on your relationship with a teenage grandchild, consider how well you really know him or her, adds Brintnall-Peterson. She suggests asking the following questions, from the University of Minnesota Extension Service, as a fun way to get to know your grandchild. Set aside time to talk about your grandchild's responses to each question.

1. What is your grandchild's favorite meal?
2. What is your grandchild's favorite class in school? Least favorite class?
3. Who is your grandchild's closest friend?
4. If your grandchild could do anything he or she chooses for a day, what would it be?
5. Who is your grandchild's favorite singer or musical group?
6. What kind of pet would your grandchild prefer?
7. What makes your grandchild really angry?
8. What embarrasses your grandchild the most?
9. What is your grandchild's biggest fear?
10. What is your grandchild's biggest complaint about your family?
11. What person outside the family has most touched your grandchild's life?
12. What is your grandchild's greatest strength?
13. What achievement or skill is your grandchild most proud of?

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