



## **UNDERSTANDING MY GRANDCHILDREN**

According to Erik Erikson, psychoanalyst, there are eight stages of development within the life cycle. These stages were formulated from extensive experience with children and adolescents. The eight stages provide us with a framework for understanding family members needs.

Each of the eight stages is organized around physical and emotional tasks. A summary of the first five stages (birth-age 20) will be discussed with a section on what grandparents can do to help their grandchildren develop during that particular stage of their life.

### **STAGE 1: Birth - 18 Months Up To 2 years -- TRUST**

#### **WHAT IS TRUST?**

If an infant learns basic trust, the child develops a belief that the environment can be counted on to meet his or her basic physiological and social needs. A child, nurtured and loved, develops trust and security and a sense of hope and optimism. If, on the other hand, the needs are not met, insecurity and mistrust develop.

#### **WHAT IS NEEDED TO ENCOURAGE TRUST TO DEVELOP?**

Caregivers can provide a dependable, responsive and predictable environment, which helps the child develop the feeling that the world is a safe place to be, that people are reliable and loving.

#### **WHAT CAN GRANDPARENTS DO TO HELP?**

Grandparents can support their children by providing care when needed and positive encouragement to the parents on a continual basis.

Grandparents should respect the needs of the infant by not overstimulating. Too many new things or experiences that are too challenging will only frustrate the child and may create stress. Instead, gently touch, talk, read, smile, sing, and play while honoring the baby's own space.

Learn to observe the infant as he or she interacts with the environment. Provide enriching new experiences for your grandchildren, such as baby exercises, music fun, language games, and making homemade toys that teach.

## **STAGE 2: 2 To 4 Years -- AUTONOMY**

### **WHAT IS AUTONOMY?**

This toddler stage occurs between about 18 months or 2 years and 32 to 4 years of age. The task in this stage is to achieve a degree of autonomy or independence while minimizing shame and doubt. The child is attempting to prove she/he is a separate person often by demonstrating acts of resistance, tantrums, stubbornness, and negativism.

### **WHAT IS NEEDED TO ENCOURAGE AUTONOMY?**

Caregivers should permit the child to explore and manipulate his or her environment in order to develop that sense of independence. In order to develop both self-control and self-esteem a fine balance between not discouraging and not pushing is recommended. If the caregivers are intolerant on allowing a child to experience and explore, the toddler will soon doubt his/hers abilities.

### **WHAT CAN GRANDPARENTS DO?**

Grandparents can encourage a discipline strategy of being firm but tolerant. Avoid unnecessary power struggles. Allow opportunities for exploration within a safe, secure environment.

Since separation from parents is a major issue, respect a child's difficulty in letting go. Provide as many chances for your grandchild to have some

positive experiences with separation by going with you. Taking a nature walk or visit to the zoo can provide wonderful social interaction, as well as introduce new surroundings for the child.

Take good care of yourself. You will need energy when caring for children of this age.

## **STAGE 3: 32 To 6 Years -- INITIATIVE**

### **WHAT IS INITIATIVE?**

Erikson believed that during this third stage the healthy developing child learns: 1) to imagine, to broaden their skills through active play of all sorts, including fantasy; 2) to cooperate with others; 3) to lead as well as to follow. This is also the stage where the child begins feeling remorse for certain actions.

### **WHAT IS NEEDED TO ENCOURAGE INITIATIVE?**

Children this age need opportunities for planning projects and outings. They are actively learning and open to new experiences and ideas. Socially a child seeks group tasks and cooperation, but if caregivers are too harsh or push too abruptly, the child learns to feel guilty about his or her feelings.

### **WHAT CAN GRANDPARENTS DO TO HELP?**

Grandparents can enthusiastically introduce grandchildren to a variety of experiences and ideas. They love to be involved in special projects and hobbies but continue to require guidance. Some possibilities are doing yard work, washing the car, or art and craft projects. These types of grandparent-grandchild interaction make them feel good and promote a sense of responsibility.

## **STAGE 4: 7 To 12 Years -- INDUSTRY**

### **WHAT IS INDUSTRY?**

A child having mastered some physical skills and many opportunities for imaginative play, must now dedicate themselves to more formal skills of life

and to learn the social skills their society requires of them. These skills include: 1) relating with peers according to rules; 2) formal teamwork structured by rules and 3) mastering social studies, reading, and math.

### **WHAT IS NEEDED TO ENCOURAGE A CHILD'S INDUSTRY?**

The children at this stage need numerous opportunities for all kinds of learning. However, if the child is allowed too little success because of harsh teachers or parents or rejecting peers, he or she will develop a sense of inferiority or inadequacy. Erikson also mentions racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination as additional sources of inferiority.

### **WHAT CAN GRANDPARENTS DO TO HELP?**

Continue the ongoing relationship with your grandchild by cooperatively working on projects together. Help them expand their horizons by providing experiences in music, arts, athletics, and environmental education. Explore the world by traveling and visiting museums. Share family stories about when you were young and when their parents attended school. Take the extra time to help them believe in themselves.

## **STAGE 5: 13 To 20 Years -- IDENTITY**

### **WHAT IS IDENTITY?**

According to Erikson, during successful early adolescence, the young person tries to integrate many roles (child, sibling, student, athlete, worker) into a constructive self image. Major issues addressed are *Who am I?* and *What will I become?* Youth during this stage have established competent skills but face uncertainty in their adult role. They indeed stand squarely between childhood and adulthood.

### **WHAT IS NEEDED TO FOSTER IDENTITY?**

A sense of identity is derived when adolescents take all they have learned about life and themselves and mold it into a meaningful unified self-image. Teenagers' appearance becomes crucial as a sign of whether he or she is accepted by their peers. Often an adolescent over-identifies with a group that is particularly eager to provide the details of identity: religious cults,

militaristic organizations, groups found on hatred, or groups that have divorced themselves from the painful demands of mainstream society.

Even the most well adjusted adolescent experiences some role identity issues. Some boys and girls experiment with minor delinquency, rebel against authority, and have self-doubts.

## **WHAT CAN GRANDPARENTS DO TO HELP?**

First and foremost, be available to listen without judgment. Do not become over alarmed at what you might hear as this will not keep the lines of communication open. Grandchildren trust grandparents and you can positively influence them.

Value your grandchildren for who they are. Encourage them to do well in school and do everything you can to help them feel that they have a future. Support them in their interests that you feel are positive.

Support their parents as they need your help at this time as well. Do not talk negatively about your grandchild to the parents or about the parents to your grandchild. This will only intensify any stress already created.

Grandparents can help keep cultural and family heritage alive. This is an important part of a teenager=s identity and further enhances their connection to family traditions.

The identity stage is the time when most grandparents become less involved in their grandchildren=s lives. Write, telephone, e-mail, send goodies. Do not wait for them to come to you. They need you more now than ever. You can truly be a stabilizing influence at a time when parents cannot reach them.

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Internet Sites:  
<http://www.ship.edu/>

<http://www.nlc.dcccd.edu/>

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