



Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Partnership of Wisconsin

Grandparents Can Be Supportive During Divorce

Coping with an adult child's divorce can be difficult, especially when grandchildren are involved. However, grandparents can take steps to support both their children and grandchildren during this challenging time, according to a University of Wisconsin-Extension program specialist in aging.

"Grandparents have to learn new ways to fill the roles, especially if their adult child does not have primary custody," says Mary Brintnall-Peterson. "For some grandparents, divorce brings added responsibility, both financially and as a caregiver for young grandchildren. Grandparents may have to emotionally support their adult children, and may feel their lives have been as affected as the divorcing adult child's."

Brintnall-Peterson has these six suggestions to help grandparents adjust to the changes in the lives of their adult child and grandchildren:

1. Deal with grief and anger.
 - The loss of a bond with your grandchildren may be emotionally difficult. Grief and anger may result, but this can lead to further problems. These feelings are normal, but you should be willing to share your feelings with others, rather than with the divorcing child.
2. Talk about your involvement.
 - Some people may prefer the social and recreational parts of grandparenting before their child's divorce. They may not be interested in a parental or caregiving role with their adult child or grandchildren. Grandparents need to talk to their adult child about the types and amount of support they can give. It may be difficult, but it can help the adult child set realistic goals and avoid future conflicts with grandparents.
3. Maintain a neutral stance with grandchildren.
 - Grandparents should take special care not to side with one parent over the other. Showing support and love to your adult child is important, but you also should avoid talking badly about the former in-laws in front of children. It's especially important to avoid offering false promises. Don't try to reassure children that their parents may get back together, and don't offer to let grandchildren live with you if they are unhappy with their parents. Instead, offer grandchildren your time and companionship during this transition. Children need a listening ear and someone they can talk to about their sadness and sense of loss.
4. Maintain a flexible attitude.

- Research has shown that grandparents who maintain flexible attitudes toward the decisions their adult children make usually have better relationships with them after a divorce. Try to remember that your adult child's life is his or her own.
5. Set new goals for yourself and your grandchildren.
 - One way to cope with changing roles is to define new goals for yourself and your grandchildren. Think about what you can do, even if your adult child does not have custody of the grandchildren. Ask yourself what you want out of the relationship with your grandchildren — long-lasting memories, a sense of history for your grandchildren, outings and fun times.
 6. Maintain regular contact.
 - Most children benefit from contact with their grandparents throughout the year. This can be difficult when grandchildren live far away or your adult child does not have custody. Think creatively about what you can do to continue a relationships — use the phone, send pictures and letters, or mail surprises to your grandchildren, such as flower petals, stamps, or Sunday comics. Ask about your grandchild's friends. Tape-record a childhood story for them. Exchange e-mail messages.

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