

**Guidelines (Do's and Don'ts)
for Expectant/New/Young Moms**

**Guidelines (Do's and Don'ts)
for Grandmothers**

By Karen L. Rancourt, Ph.D.

“Ask Dr. Gramma Karen”

Guidelines (Do's and Don'ts) for Expectant/New/Young Moms

1. If there are differences between your parenting practices and those of your mom / MIL (mother-in-law), explain your views, but don't try to get your mom or MIL to agree that you are "right." Your mom / MIL merely have to agree to honor your rules when they interact with your children.
2. Help your mom / MIL understand your parenting preferences and practices by inviting them to: read the books and view the videos that have influenced you; visit the Web sites and blogs you visit for advice; go together to hear various speakers; listen to the same Webinars on parenting and grandparenting.
3. Do lighten up! Get in touch with what is really going on if you totally freak out when your mom / MIL let your child have an extra dessert. It's probably not really about a chocolate chip cookie. You need to figure out what's really bothering you, why it's bothering you, communicate it constructively, and if necessary, make appropriate apologies.
4. Your mom / MIL may have some different rules and boundaries for the grandchildren in their own homes. You don't let them jump on the beds in your house, but Grandma doesn't care. You would never let your kids have leftover pizza for breakfast, but Grandma would. However, most rules for routines, such as naps and bedtimes for the younger grandchildren, need to be followed.
5. Be aware of and sensitive to the rivalry or jealousy that can develop between your mom and your MIL, that is, one feeling the other gets special treatment. You may have to lay out some consistent rules you need both your mom / MIL to follow, e.g., caps on how much can be spent on gifts, try to equalize amount of time they get to spend with the grandchildren.
6. Accept that sometimes you may favor your mom over your MIL, or vice versa. It can be a case of proximity, with one simply living closer than the other and therefore able to be more involved. But sometimes you may prefer the values and/or personality of your mom / MIL. You may simply feel more comfortable around one over the other. Your goal is to use acceptance, kindness and respect to build the best relationship possible with both your mom and mother-in-law.
7. If you choose to address an issue in a family meeting with your mom / MIL, it is suggested that the parent who is their son or daughter take the lead. It is usually much easier to hear about an issue or concern if it is initially presented by the son or daughter.
8. Tell your mom / MIL specifically what they can do to for you when they offer to help or you're requesting their help, e.g., "Please take the baby for an hour walk to the park and do not let her fall asleep." (And bite your tongue, or correct in a gentle, loving way

if your mom / MIL get it wrong and bring back a sleeping baby! And maybe re-read #3.)

9. When your mom / MIL is babysitting, write down all the information they will need: about nap time and bedtime routines and special sleeping companions, such as stuffed animals and blankets; details for feeding schedules; rules about television programs and developmental CDs; directions for giving prescriptions and medications; emergency numbers.
10. Make sure your mom / MIL are clear about their role when they are alone with your nanny or babysitter. If there are problems, your mom / MIL need to know whether you want them to get involved or stay in the background.
11. Help your mom / MIL purchase appropriate car seats for their own vehicles, and show them how to install and de-install them. Same for strollers, pack 'n plays and any other equipment you want them to use or own.
12. Suggest activities for your mom / MIL to do with your kids. You know your area and the special activities going on. Provide all the details for it to work out, e.g., print out driving directions or get GPS coordinates; give suggestions where to park; get tickets in advance; make suggestions for restaurants the kids will like and are in line with your mom's /MIL's budgets.
13. Help your mom / MIL with long-distance grandparenting. Suggest that your mom / MIL:
 - Take advantage of the Internet, especially with older grandchildren: e.g., E-mail, Skype, share photos and sites with information of places to visit together, share favorite music.
 - Keep notes of what they learn from their grandchild(ren) in phone calls / Skyping / visits, so they can reference this information in future interactions, e.g., doll's names, their friends' names, games they like, movies they want to see. This helps the long-distance bonding and is proof positive to the grandchildren that their grandmothers are listening to them and that they are interested in their lives.
 - Plan things together to do the next time they'll be with the grandchildren.
 - Tell their grandchildren about their hobbies, and when possible, share their hobbies, and teach them, e.g., chess, biking, knitting, baking, sailing.
14. You can never show your mom / MIL too much respect or gratitude for all they do.
15. When in doubt, lighten up!

Guidelines (Do's and Don'ts) for Grandmothers

1. Remember that you are a grandparent, not the parent. This means you must do a lot of tongue biting and allow your daughter / daughter-in-law to set the boundaries and rules for your interactions with your grandchildren. If you want to have ongoing and welcomed access to your grandchildren, zip it, zip it, zip it!
2. Do not try to impose your values or parenting preferences on your daughter / daughter-in-law. Ask your daughter / daughter-in-law to tell you about any books they'd like you to read, or videos to watch, that can help you better understand how they're trying to raise their children. Your job is to understand their intended parenting, not try to change it.
3. Pay special attention to your daughter / daughter-in-law's verbal and non-verbal cues. If you sense your behavior is causing them stress or discomfort, re-read guideline #1. Also, a sincere apology can go a long way.
4. If you feel your daughter / daughter-in-law prefer to spend more time with the other set of grandparents, you may want to ask if there are any specific things you could be doing to be a better grandparent. If you ask, your job is to listen, not try to defend or explain yourself.
5. Be real clear on your daughter's / daughter-in-law's preferences about visiting: should you call first, or is showing up unannounced permissible.
6. If you live within commuting distance and it is possible, talk with your daughter / daughter-in-law about setting aside regular time(s) each week to come into their homes. Also discuss how best to use this dedicated time. Knowing they have a free block of time to look forward to every week can make your daughter / daughter-in-law feel like they won the lottery!
7. If your daughter / daughter-in-law have a nanny or babysitter, discuss with them your role when you're alone with the nanny or babysitter.
8. When you look around your daughter / daughter-in-law's house and see some jobs that might be done, ask if it would be helpful if you either did them yourself, or if you were to hire someone to do them. Over time you will work out with your daughter / daughter-in-law what things you can just automatically do without causing an issue.
9. Check with your daughter / daughter-in-law before making any purchases of equipment (car seats, cribs, pack 'n plays, strollers) to keep in your car or house or to be given as gifts.

10. Check with your daughter / daughter-in-law on the appropriateness and timing of all gifts or money.
11. Do not ask your grandchild to be complicit in any secrets. You can plan a surprise with your grandchild, but never ask him/her to “not tell your parents.”
12. Support your grown children when they want to carve out their own family traditions (e.g., holidays, birthdays) instead of trying to get them to continue with the traditions you’ve established.
13. Say only positive things about your grandchildren’s parents; same goes for any other (step) grandparents in the family.
14. Do not play favorites amongst your grandchildren; do not make comparisons.
15. If you are a long-distance grandmother, work closely with your daughter / daughter-in-law to make this work for everyone.
 - Take advantage of the Internet, especially with older grandchildren: e.g., E-mail, Skype, share photos and sites with information of places to visit together, share favorite music.
 - Keep notes of what you learn from your grandchild(ren) in phone calls / Skyping / visits, so you can reference this information in future interactions, e.g., doll’s names, their friends’ names, games they like, movies they want to see. This helps the long-distance bonding and is proof positive to your grandchildren that you are listening to them and you are interested in their lives.
 - Plan things together to do the next time you’ll be together.
 - Tell your grandchildren about your hobbies, and when possible, share your hobbies, and teach them, e.g., chess, biking, knitting, baking, sailing.
16. When in doubt, zip it!