

Effective grandparenting

• BATYA LUDMAN

A strange thing happens in Israel during August. We were told this within hours after our first grandchild (a.k.a. future camper) was born. Grandparents help look after the grandkids because their working parents can't take off for the weeks when daycare is closed. Our problem – these grandparents are still working full time!

Fast forward to “Camp Saftie and Zaydie.” How lucky could we be? We were invited to look after a 22-month old for a few hours so that Mom could actually get some work done. Like Mary Poppins, we arrived with our overstuffed bag full of tricks. How does one entertain a young child in 2018? We decided the same as we did with her parent, except as grandparents we now had both the appreciation for, and the luxury of, time – time that we didn't have as parents, when we were incredibly stressed between children and work, time that her parents definitely don't have now given their intense schedules. Time – after many years of observing society and our family – to see the difference between what's really important in life and what we thought was important!

Arriving with our bag, we were greeted by a tiny little person with the biggest smile imaginable toddling toward the door saying, “S-a-f-t-i-e,” as she wrapped her arms around my leg. Seriously, is there anything better than when your grandchildren want to be with you, whether they're 22 months or 22 years old? I think not, but I am a relatively new grandparent, so check back “later” for the sequel.

We began our day by going out for breakfast. She is not the biggest fan of the highchair, as it has long been put away in her home, along with her bib, but she willingly consented to both. She knew where her bread was buttered! In the next hour, she both sampled an assortment of food and drink and checked out a variety of textures with her lips, fingers, straw, spoon and more. She helped string Cheerios on a shoelace (an old favorite of my children when we made crafts at birthday parties) and colored in a notebook. She was well supervised and had a blast. I'm guessing that for better or worse we probably had fewer rules than her parents, but never once thought of letting her open sugar packets, which we observed other kids doing at other tables. While she knows how to swipe the phone screen with all the expertise of a two-year-old, other than the reassuring videos we sent to her parents, the phone was away, we were very present and hands on. Eating accomplished, we moved on to entertainment.

Already in the mall, it made sense to check out the children's rides. After

paying for one, we discovered she was just as happy when the ride was motionless, adding her own noises, beeping horns and turning wheels, while we saved the money. After looking into store windows with bright displays, and looking at some books, we ventured to the park. Worn out by two crazy adults, our charge fell asleep before getting out of the stroller. Somewhat disappointed that our time ended so soon, we brought her home, helped Mommy a bit, and left sadly to return to our home. The jury was unanimous: a good time was had by all.

You may have to modify these suggestions depending on the age of your child, and I'm sure you can add to the list, but here is a small sampling of guidelines for effective (grand)parenting.

1. Do unto your children and grandchildren as you would like them to do unto you. Treat them with the same respect that you'd ask of them. Talk

to them calmly, quietly, honestly and openly and, more importantly, be there to listen. This is a real gift that grandparents can offer.

2. It is important to let children explore but equally important to set limits. The rules in a child's and grandparent's home may differ, but all need to agree with what grandparents can do, so that the parents' work isn't unintentionally sabotaged. Being too lenient or having too many rules may be counter-productive for everyone. An open, honest relationship between everyone is essential.

3. Let your grandchildren know what behaviors you expect, making sure that your expectations are age-appropriate and realistic. This can be done in a warm, loving and positive way.

4. Most issues aren't serious; they may just feel it at the time. Does it really matter, for example, if she wants to wear something other than what you picked out for her? Let her choose between two

possibilities and feel good about her emerging independence.

5. Sometimes, as adults, we have to say no, giving our reasons and then moving on. Not every “no” deserves a lengthy discussion, but each “no” needs to be consistently enforced. Many children will test you to see if this time, for example, it's okay to pour the sugar on the table. Our rule has been that if something is not okay to do at home, it's not okay in a restaurant or in someone else's home. Wanting to be welcomed back, the children know that we clean up before we depart. If you look at other tables in a restaurant, you will see that not everyone feels the same way. That said, sometimes finger-painting is okay at Camp Saftie but not at home or vice versa.

6. Reward good behavior with praise, encouragement and attention. Children never get tired of hearing it. Reward trying and not just success. Write to me and I'll happily send you my list of 101 ways to praise a child. Hugs, kisses and smiles are nice rewards, and earning privileges such as a later bedtime, or a special activity such as homemade pizza night are easy and effective ways to show that you caught them “being good.”

7. A promise is a promise is a promise. Say what you mean, mean what you say and follow through on what you have said if you want children to believe you and learn from your example.

8. Treat all of your children fairly, but not necessarily equally. For example, the seven- and 10-year-old may not have the same bedtime. This is perfectly acceptable, although the children may not agree.

9. Don't do for your child what he's able to do for himself. Children learn to become more responsible when given the opportunity to do age-appropriate activities on their own. For example, while it may be tempting to tie a child's shoe or dress them because you can do it faster, you may inadvertently slow down the development of a new skill while taking away their opportunity to feel proud of their accomplishments and burgeoning independence.

As the holidays come to a close and children return to school, hopefully you enjoyed and feel proud of the role you played in enhancing their development. ■

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The Magazine erroneously ran a previous Psychology column in the September 21 issue. Above is the new column that was supposed to appear.



‘IT IS important to let children explore but equally important to set limits.’ (TNS)

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