

Caregiver's Corner Column (June 2013)

Balancing Grandparenting and Caregiving during the Summer Season

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Evergreen Commons

Summer is a time that most of us look forward to. It is great to be outside, work in the garden, spend time at the lake, take a vacation and take a break from usual activities. For some people, it means spending more time with family. However, for some of us, there will be an added responsibility of taking care of grandchildren while they are on their school break. This can be enjoyable, but sometimes it has its challenges, especially if you are already a caregiver for your spouse. Balancing both of these responsibilities can be difficult.

Caregiving for a spouse can be very stressful and having a good relationship with your grandchildren can help bring joy to your life. Grandparenting is an opportunity to see the world in a new way through younger eyes, to watch children develop through the stages of their life and just to experience music, nature, reading and games with a curious young mind. Whatever your specific circumstances are, by expressing love you are already doing a good job of grandparenting.

A good first step to a successful relationship with your grandchildren is to establish some ground rules with your son or daughter:

- Be clear with them about what role you want to have in your grandchild's life.
- Talk with parents about their rules and maintain those rules when your grandchild is with you.
- Enforce any agreed upon consequences for bad behavior.
- Baby proof your home to ensure safety for infants and toddlers.
- Don't try to be their parent, respect the parenting decisions your children have made.
- Instead of trying to buy your grandchild's affection, think of a fun activity to do with them instead that will build memories.
- Whatever you do for one grandchild, you need to do for all of them.

So often, caregivers get caught up in the daily pressures of being a caregiver. Children also have the pressures of school, sports, homework, church activities. Taking it easy and slowing down is helpful to both you and your grandchildren. It gives you both an opportunity to feel, reflect, and express emotions without being rushed. Some tips to make the most of the time you have with your grandchildren:

- Carve out one-on-one time for each grandchild. It will allow you to bond without competition from the other children.
- See the sights. Enjoy concerts, movies, plays, museums, parks or walks in the neighborhood.
- Play games. You are able to observe how your grandchildren operate in the world and you can help them learn to be a good sport and play fairly.

- Communicate family history. Tell stories about what you and their parents were like when they were children. Make a video of them interviewing you, or scrapbook together.

Some fun things to do with your grandchildren:

- Stare at clouds and make up stories about what you see.
- Catch frogs
- Play catch
- Scope out parking lots for state license plates. Try to find all 50.
- Build a birdhouse
- Take turns reading
- Go on a picnic, even if it is just in the backyard
- Build an outdoor tepee or fort
- Collect seashells
- Tour your local firehouse
- Make puppets
- Pick fruit from a local farm and make jam or bake a pie with it
- Go on a scavenger hunt
- Plant flowers or vegetables
- Wash your car in swimsuits
- Fly a kite
- Ride a bus
- Take pictures of things you find interesting
- Make jewelry
- Repaint a fence
- Teach them to play marbles
- Go to a batting cage or golf range for practice
- Go to a farmer's market
- Skim pebbles
- Collect fireflies
- Shuck corn and eat it for dinner
- Keep a scrapbook of all of your adventures

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