



For Parents of young children

A Young Child And His Grandparents

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE ■ UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Many of today's grandparents no longer live near their grandchildren. Others are still working or are involved with volunteer projects or other activities. Whatever the reason, the role of grandparents not only has changed but also has become obscure.

In the "good old days," a family often included one or two sets of grandparents, a maiden aunt, a stray cousin, or a helper in the home. Although difficulties certainly arose when several generations lived together, such associations provided elements we can envy and admire. For one thing, a household of mixed membership added variety to the family scene and enriched the daily experiences of little children. With the passing of this mode of living, the role of grandparents in family life has changed. Some facets of it are discussed below.

Part Of The Family

The average American family is small. It usually includes only mother, father, and children, which places tremendous responsibility upon parents to provide everything necessary for the growth and development of their children. Although it is of prime importance that his mother and father provide a child's strongest support, knowing that he has other "family" such as grandparents increases his understanding of what a family is. It also adds to the number of people a child can trust and so increases his confidence and security.

Bestowing Love

One role of grandparents always has remained: simply to enjoy their grandchildren, to listen to them, to be interested in them, and to love them. Grand-

parents and grandchildren often have the most leisure time of any family members, so sharing their leisure is natural. Grandparents can thus help parents supply the love and comfort little children need.

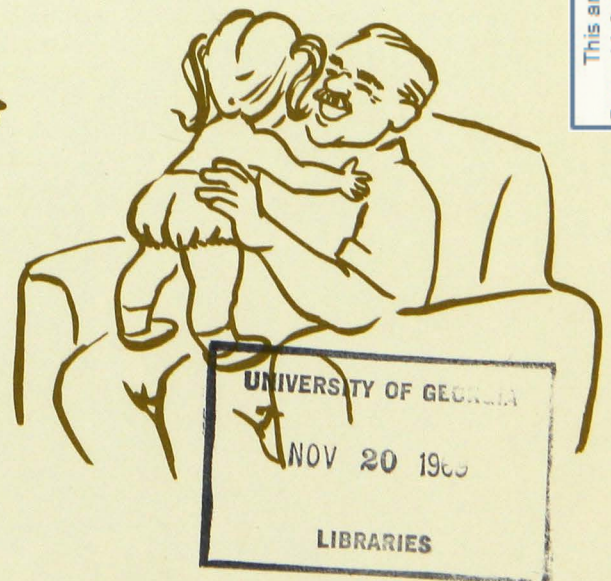
Supporting Role

If grandparents abuse their privilege to love their grandchild by trying to win his affections away from his parents, they confuse the child. An unwritten law for grandparents says: Act in a supporting role in matters of affection, discipline, gift giving, etc. Grandparents occupy a special place in the family, but what the parents want for their children should be of main concern. Grandparents who live their own lives and have their own interests are not likely to use their grandchildren to satisfy their own unfulfilled needs.

Helping Out

Most grandparents are reluctant to admit that small children tire them. But the amount of time and energy grandparents can devote to babysitting varies with each individual. Apparently the ability to cope with the noise and confusion of living with little children must be relearned, and relearning it requires more than a few hours or days. Grandparents should feel free to tell their children when they will babysit without fear that their limits will be interpreted as not wanting to spend time with the grandchildren.

As much as grandparents want to see their grandchildren, they also enjoy the company of their own children. In the rush of dropping off and picking up the grandchildren, many parents forget this. As a parent, try to make a point of visiting on an adult level with your parents whenever you can.



Links With Past

"Tell me about the olden days," is a frequent request of children. But reminiscences and comparisons of today with the past are so frequently called tiresome that many grandparents hesitate to talk about the past. By not talking about it, they deprive children of a rich source of information and delight. Stories about grandmother's youth can give a genuine and personal meaning to the past that children are likely to gain in no other way.

A Picture Of Old Age

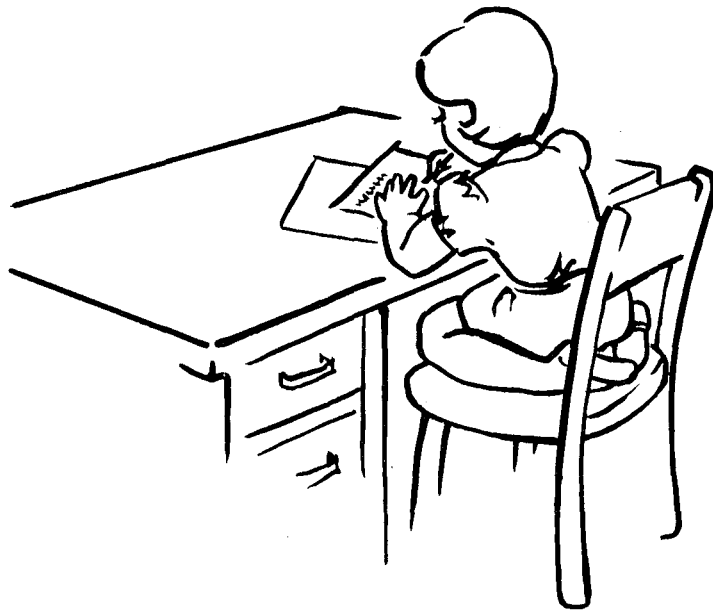
Since grandparents can no longer demand respect simply because they are old, they must work at being the kind of grandparents little children admire and respect. Parents can help in creating this picture of old age. If parents criticize grandparents and frequently are out of sorts with them, the children will sense the strain. Children need to witness a grandparent-parent relationship that is free of faultfinding, dread, and misunder-

Fun With Simple Toys

Sometimes children who have developed manual dexterity enjoy making simple toys from scraps and waste materials more than they enjoy factory-made toys.

Collect match boxes to make a whole roomful of doll furniture, experimenting to see what your children enjoy most. You might begin by making a doll's cradle. Cut out two pieces of cardboard to form a headboard and footboard. Curve the bottom of each piece and glue one to each end of the open box. Use colored paper for making blankets and a pillow. Glue several boxes together to make a chest of drawers.

Let the children figure out how to make other pieces of furniture such as a chair by placing two boxes together and cutting away one end or a table by upending one box and gluing a circular piece on top.



standing. They will then be more likely to think of old age as a rich and rewarding period.

Some grandparents are progressive, active, and up-to-date. Such grandparents usually are openminded about new methods of rearing children. They are ready with advice, but they never impose it. Other grandparents remain rigid and accept only their own methods of bringing up children.

When grandparents live with the family, definite rules about how the children are to be disciplined must be established. If the children spend considerable time with their grandparents or if grandparents care for the children while the parents work, the grandparents may have to use more of their own methods in dealing with the children. In any case, parents and grandparents should seek some kind of understanding so that the children receive similar treatment most of the time. Of course, differences are bound to exist and some exposure to differences can be healthy.

Keeping in touch with grandchildren sometimes is a problem when grandparents live far away. Being punctual in re-

membering birthdays and special days, sending an occasional special greeting, and talking to the child on the telephone will do much to keep the grandparent-grandchild relationship vital. One grandmother says she always adds a postscript especially for her grandson when she writes to her daughter.

Suggested Readings

1. Fuerst, Rita M., "Grandparents are to Love," *Parents' Magazine*, August 1967, pp. 38ff.
2. Miller, Floyd, "The Expectant Grandfather's Guidebook," *Harvest Years*, April 1968, condensed in *Reader's Digest*, April 1968.
3. *Mother-in-Law and Grandmother*, Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 174, 25¢.
4. *Young Adults and Their Parents*, Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 355, 25¢.

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