

# TAKING TIME

by Rebecca Escott

Extension Home Economist



By Presidential Proclamation, tomorrow is National Grandparents' Day. "Happy grandparenting" to those of you who are grandparents.

It seems in recent decades, the grandparent's role has changed as dramatically as the roles of mother and father, husband and wife. Today's grandmothers, according to Dr. Elaine Ashcroft of Utah State University, may be actively involved in careers and community responsibilities. This may be a switch from earlier days when every grandmother was pictured at

home, happily baking treats or sewing gifts for their extended family.

But having a job and being somewhat less accessible is only one new trend in grandparenting. According to the U.S. Census, in the last decade, the number of children living with their grandparents has increased by almost 40% to 3.2 million. Out of necessity or convenience, 4% of white family households and 12% of African-American household describe themselves in this situation. Millions more children spend signif-

icant amounts of time under a grandparent's direct care.

When a grandparent is thrust into a primary caregiving role, new questions and issues surface. Many older adults feel uncomfortable in this position. They may be unfamiliar with new pediatric medicines and child products. The line regarding discipline and other decisions involving the children may be fuzzy. Sometimes the older adult is unsure if this is a permanent or temporary situation.

If you are involved in this kind of situation, it is crucial that all the adults involved sit down and communicate. Nationally, there are at least 150 support groups for grandparents who are "parenting" their grandchildren. These groups and their members can encourage an older adult facing these new family challenges. "Grandparents as Parents (GAP)," "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren," and "Second Time Grandparents" and three such organizations.

Even if you as a grandparent are not in a primary caregiving role,

tensions between you and your children regarding the grandchildren may exist. It is important to establish an early pattern of communication. In most cases, a grandparent should not assume primary responsibility of a child. This means, she normally should defer to the parents' style of discipline and daily routines.

But in all cases, it is healthy to ask questions, to listen carefully, and to move slowly. A confident grandmother may naturally and swiftly take action that rightfully should be carried out by her children.

On the opposite side, parents sometimes "dump" children on grandparents without thoughtful consideration. These situations will not correct themselves. Honest communication by both parties and some careful evaluation of the situation can bring improvements. Say clearly what you can and cannot do - what you wish to do or not do.

As a grandparent, you have

choices. You can choose to babysit four days in a row or ten days this month. You can choose to make your grandchild's Halloween costume. You can choose to ride in a car for three hours to attend a sports event. Or you can say "No."

Dr. Glen Jenson, Utah State University, suggests grandparents can maximize their role in a variety of ways including: being a confidant and companion to grandchildren, being a disseminator of special skills, being a special model of how to adjust to change, and, of course, sharing the family histories, traditions and culture.

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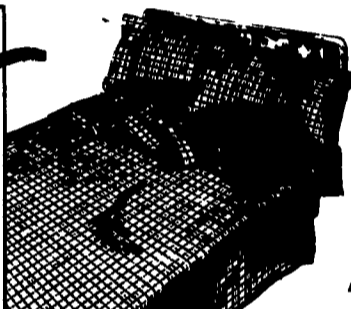


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