

How Grandparents Can Help With A Newborn



Most parents are eager for the arrival of a baby. Grandparents are excited too, perhaps even more than their grown children, especially true with the arrival of the first grandchild.

A baby's birth can be a very emotional time for a mother or birthing person. Carrying the baby for 9 months and going through labor can be quite exhausting. When the baby is born, it needs constant care and attention. At this stage, most people are sleep-deprived because a baby needs to be fed in the middle of the night. If a parent is suffering from post-natal depression they may feel quite miserable and even inadequate.

At this point, help from the grandparents can be wonderful. However, there is a thin line between helping care for a newborn and interfering and imposing your own parenting style on your children.

According to Pinky McKay, who is a grandmother and parenting expert, "Working with parents and also being a grandparent - I think it's important for new parents to try to GENTLY suggest what would be most helpful to them, if they are offered help. Often, I hear that grandmothers whip around cleaning when what the parent really wants is a 'break' from holding, rocking - feeling totally responsible. But to the grandmother, cleaning is something 'tangible' that she can do. It's really about acknowledging the help you do get." If you get any help, you are lucky. It seems that so many grandmothers either have their own careers or are elderly - so, they don't have the capacity to actually be helpful in a practical way.

It's important for new parents to make space for grandparents to be involved with their newborn. It's very painful for grandparents to be "held at arms' length" or to be repeatedly told, "No, you can't come over to see the children/baby because we are having visitors/going out with friends etc." This often results in the grandparents giving up hope of drawing close to their grandchild because they feel unwelcome.

HOW CAN GRANDPARENTS HELP THEIR CHILDREN CARE FOR A NEWBORN - WITHOUT BEING OBTRUSIVE?

Pinky McKay offers this advice to grandparents, "Have a talk with your kids (sons / daughters / daughters-in-law / sons-in-law) regarding what would be most helpful to you (the newborn's parents) right now. "Would you like me to hold/help with the baby or do the dishes?"

If you are feeling 'rejected' because of different parenting styles try to stay calm and watch things unfold. I often have had grandmothers buy my books to pass on to their kids who may be leaving babies to cry for instance. This can be an option rather than expressing a strong opinion. You run the risk of not getting to see the grandbabies if you say too much. It's your job as a grandparent to dish out love but try to keep advice to yourself unless you are asked."

Pinky adds, "It could help to 'gently' ask questions about the 'new' advice or make a comment about it like: 'I'm sorry this is so different to when I had my kids. Please - can you fill me in on this new way of doing xxxxx?' Perhaps offer to do something that is neutral - "Would you like me to take her for a walk or give her a bath?" Remember it is your grandchild. The parents are ultimately responsible and trust that your own nurturing of them will filter down to how they parent. With respect and acceptance of what they do, they are more likely to open conversations and share how they feel - especially if some of the advice they are trying doesn't work for them. Then, you can step in - tread carefully though. There could be nothing worse than being kept away from the joy of your grandbabies."

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"My parents were fantastic. Mom would come around with home cooked meals, allowed me to have a sleep for a few hours between feeds, tucked up in their bed, whilst looking after my daughter. They took baby for a walk while I have a 20 minute massage to get all the muscles relaxed and a bit of me time and gave me lots of cuddles when I looked like I needed one. Mom was never in the way, just fluttered in and out to give us time to settle in - just the 2 of us. Now that I am back at work full-time, my parents look after her everyday. My Dad has filled in as the predominant male in my daughter's life and always has spent time telling Ruby stories - and now she is older - teaching her the timetables at 2 years old. I am blessed to have such wonderful supportive parents."

~ Samm

Grandparents should also remember that a lot has changed since they had their own children. To enable you to help your 'kids' effectively when dealing with a newborn, you should... get informed!

Since grandparents had their own children, much has changed about parenting. Different kinds of research, studies and evidence available in different forms of media prove this fact. Rigid, strict routines like letting baby 'cry-it-out' have been proven to be detrimental - especially to young babies. Strict feeding routines have also been proven to be harmful to both the baby's growth and the breast/chest milk production.

Having access to the internet has really changed society. Information is at the tip of our fingers, and it is often the first place people these days, go to, for information on pregnancy and parenting. Today's grandparents know that their children have likely researched what they'd like to do and why. If you are a grandparent and you get involved and read about the new methods of parenting, then, you'll have something to discuss with your children and you will be able to relate to them in a different way.

New parents who are children of nurses or midwives seem especially vulnerable to butting heads! Grandparents have a different idea of how parenting should be. If your grown children do not agree with your parenting style, they aren't telling you that you aren't appreciated or experienced. They just like to do things in a different way. Here's an example of how to create resentment when the new family is trying to establish what they'd like to do as a parents.

"My mother-in-law lectured me about breastfeeding for too long (my daughter fed frequently and for 45 minutes or so, each time), told us we should let her cry more before we pick her up and wearing her in the sling so much was creating a bad habit. She also told me that my daughter's hiccups were because I overfed her. She added her washing to my never-ending pile and told me it was there for when I did my washing. She only helped with the washing a couple of times in 10 days. She wanted to put honey on my daughter's tummy and argued with me when I told her how that is no longer the done thing. Actually, she argued about everything I said as 'she had been a nurse looking after babies 50 years ago AND she'd raised 3 children without any issues'."

~Taurean

GRANDPARENTS SHOULD KNOW A FEW KEY THINGS WHEN HELPING THEIR 'KIDS' WITH PARENTING:

- Hold back the temptation to criticise your children. Remain positive and praise the good qualities of your grown child and their spouse or partner.
- Always affirm that they are caring and loving parents. Assure them that they are doing well.
- Tell them that you are proud of them for having the right priorities such as attending to all the baby's needs over doing chores in the house.
- Let them choose their support from members of the family.

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Your children, who are now parents, need unconditional support - especially the mother or birthing person. The most loving thing you can do is let go of your judgement and ideas on how things should be, and be loving and accepting of how they chooses to parent their children.

You can also attend classes with them, from breast/chestfeeding to parenting - helping you to become an even more powerful support for times when your advice is sought after.

WHAT CAN GRANDPARENTS DO IF THEIR CHILDREN TURN DOWN THEIR OFFERS OF HELP?

In this case, Pinkey McKay suggests, "Really there is nothing you can do. Try not to take it too personally. Live your own life with purpose and joy and congratulate yourself on bringing up such independent 'kids'. If you need to vent - vent to another grandparent who is also feeling left out - rather than complaining to your kids, as that will only create more distance. If things do feel really tough, try calmly talking to your own child without criticizing their spouse/partner about how you would love to see the grandbabies more often. Offer an invitation to come over for a meal - that way you at least see the kids even if you don't get to actually have much input."

WHAT DO NEW PARENTS WANT?

Here are some comments from new parents who are very grateful for what their parents did to help them with their newborn:

"My mom was awesome, she brought food over and cleaned my floors and did the ironing. She was so encouraging and happy to help in any way she could. Even just being on the other end of the phone while I cried was great help."

~Trish

"My mother-in-law arranged homemade meals for one week! Each day, a different church member would stop by with dinner. She also took my 3 year old and 1 year old for a night over a few different times during the first two weeks. My mother would come by during the hours my husband was working and help with the children. All of this assistance was wonderful during the adjustment phase of newborn #3. It was especially helpful as I'm exclusively a breastfeeding mama."

~Nicole

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Every new mother or parent needs help when dealing with a newborn. Each wants to help in different forms. Grandparents should ask their children directly, how they can help. One thing is clear though: Grandparents have a supporting role in the childhood of their grandkids and perhaps the most important contribution that you can make is to give your children positive feedback on how they raise their own kids.

All grandparents know how difficult it is to raise children, especially for first-time parents. By assisting your child with a newborn baby, you allow them to have some time to unwind. This, in turn, will allow them to be more able to cope with the responsibility of raising their child.

"My parents told me I was doing a good job, didn't smother me and let my husband and I have space to figure things out. They only gave advice when asked, helped with meals and housework. They helped more when my husband went back to work."

~Amaunet

"They gave us space! They made sure we knew they were there if we needed them - no matter what time of day, no matter how silly the question was - but they made sure we knew it was on our terms not theirs!"

~Sahbear