

# Grandparents Get Tips on Offering Support

The hopes and joys of prospective parents and grandparents may be dashed when an eagerly awaited baby is born with a disability. Both parent and grandparent experience similar feelings of sadness, shock and grief, however the grandparent's grief is *doubled*— they are concerned not only for their newborn grandchild, but for their own child as well.

## Here are some tips for grandparents:

### **Offer support, but don't hover.**

Unconditional love and support are very important for the parents.

### **Ask how you can help in practical matters.**

If the grandparents don't know how to help the family, please say so. Ask what the family needs help with. Sometimes it's the very practical matters in which the grandparents can assist.

### **Learn as much about the disability or diagnosis as possible.**

Becoming informed will show you want to be involved.

### **Offer opinions only if asked.**

One parent felt that grandparents thought she wasn't doing enough, or doing the right things. Do your best to let your children know they are doing a good job as parents.

### **Accept your grandchild as he or she is.**

First and foremost, he or she is a child who should be loved unconditionally.

*Reprinted from FINFacts*

"I worried, of course, about the welfare of my grandchild, but my heart broke even more for my son and daughter-in-law for what they were going through..."



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## More tips to remember:

### **Do remember non-verbal expressions**

A loving pat to your grandchild's head, a warm hug to your son and his spouse convey what words cannot express. By the same token, pitying glances and an anxious tone may be conveyed as disappointment.

### **Be positive**

A tender, loving attitude toward the grandchild will encourage other family members to be supportive as well.

### **Do be aware that there are revolving cycles of grief**

Feelings of depression, anger, non-acceptance or sorrow usually surface around stressed times or milestones such as birthdays or when your grandchild should have been walking or talking. Knowing this ahead of time can help prevent the reaction from becoming extreme.

As grandparents, you can offer your children much love and support through this difficult time. You will even find that there are many positive aspects that you may not have expected to find.

## Here are some tips for parents:

### **Be honest.**

Open communication and an honest expression of wants and needs works best. If grandparents ask how they can help, tell them as explicitly as possible: Can you go to the grocery store? Can you take the other kids for an evening? Most grandparents will be delighted with a little bit of direction.

### **Educate your parents.**

Send them literature, pamphlets or books about your baby's disability. Have them accompany you on doctor visits, therapy sessions, etc. Let them ask the professionals questions so that they can learn *firsthand* the characteristics of the disability. This may also help to dispel certain misperceptions that the grandparents may have. Help them to relax, enjoy and bond with your baby to help deepen the family ties.

### **Encourage them to join the Grandparent Support Group of the DSAGC.**

The DSAGC can connect you with one of our two groups for grandparents—Ohio and Kentucky. These groups meet regularly to brag about their grandchildren and share common bonds. These groups offer both social and emotional support.

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The mission of the DSAGC is to empower individuals, educate families, enhance communities and together, celebrate the extraordinary lives of people with Down syndrome.

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