

Grandparenting Good Enough for a Daughter-In-Law



You've already raised your kids. In fact, you did it so well, this girl-well, woman-actually fell in love with one of them. So why is it she doesn't seem to trust you with your own grandchild?

Pleasing your particular daughter-in-law just may be impossible. But there are some things to do that might at least make her less... shall we say prickly?

Number one, of course, is hold your tongue. Junior's hair looks like a rat's nest? "He's so cute!" Princess poured maple syrup on your car keys and fed them to her gerbil? "What a great imagination!" So what if the two of them played tag-team dervishes in the china closet. "They get along so well!" And when Junior's a little older and lot more sullen, and Princess strolls the mall looking like last night's trash, they'll just be "thoughtful and unique" as far as you're concerned.

Yes, today's parents go too easy. Maybe you would have shaved Junior's head and locked Princess in her room. And maybe that's the kind of parenting that turned your own Junior into this one's father-the man your daughter-in-law loves. But your Junior loves your daughter-in-law as well, and he's part of the team that's raising those thoughtful and imaginative little ones-their way.

Your daughter-in-law doesn't want to hear how well you did it, or how you'd do it differently from her. She will, however, hang on every word of every story of every mishap you had. The time your Junior jumped off the roof of the treehouse in the neighbor's yard and broke his femur and the collarbone of the girl he landed on (where were you? Oh, that's right, in the house at the time...). Or the time your Princess stuffed the noise maker from a party favor up her nose and you had to stuff the baby-with measles-in the car with the squeaking girl for a trip to the emergency room, where your Princess promptly snorted out the noise maker and the nurses publicly chastised you for bringing out an infectious baby. Those things will make any daughter-in-law smile.

And those stories are also the best inroads for advice. Tell your daughter-in-law about the time you had to take your Junior to the company picnic right after he'd shaved stripes into his head and painted eyebrows on his forehead with permanent marker. She's liable to trade you the story of how Junior braided hot-glue strings into his hair and now she can't even comb it. You'll know why he's wearing that rat's nest, and she might just ask you what you did, or maybe even, if you're lucky, what you would do now.

Your daughter-in-law will be willing to learn from your mistakes, but she's still living her own. Right now, to her, they're momentous occasions, fearful crises, and staggering difficulties. It will take years for her to see them as mistakes-if she ever does. And maybe, as those years pass, you'll come to see them as something else, too.