



# Caregiver of Children News 12/2022



## MANAGING HOLIDAY STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH GIFT-GIVING FOR PARENTING GRANDPARENTS

By: Elaine K. Williams

While many of us look forward to the Holidays to celebrate with family and friends, the Holidays can be very stressful. The pressure to buy more than we can afford; the pressure to buy what our grandchildren want, despite the expense; the stress of the absence, and in some cases the presence of your grandchildren's parents, can be a major strain depending on the quality or lack of quality in their relationship. Children of all ages tend to be "reactive" and even "hyperactive" as the holidays approach, especially if they are under the age of 13.

In the case of most parenting grandparents, money is limited and the ability to buy your grandchildren what they want may be limited. Part of the pressure for the children is they frequently want what their friends or classmates want, and that may break the budget!

Besides monetary challenges, parenting grandparents also face emotional challenges. There is something about the holidays that make all of us sentimental. We want to feel included and close to our family; we want to feel special and loved by our parents; not just by their presence, but also by what they give us as gifts. As parenting grandparents, you may feel the desire to "make-up" for the absence of your grandchildren's parents or for the negative chaos they bring into the family. You may want to spend more than you can afford; or, you may feel guilty that you cannot give your grandchildren what they desire.

Let me ask you to pause for a moment and not succumb to any of these pressures. There is no gift greater than love. There is no gift greater than a warm hug, which says you're safe and secure and I will always care for and about you. There are so many creative, inexpensive ways to tell your grandkids how important they are to you and how much you love them. Gifts from the heart is what they really need from you. Baking each of them a serving of their favorite cookies, writing them a coupon for a favorite dinner or dessert; a note about why they mean so much to you and why they are special to you and to life; decorating a Christmas tree that they picked out with popcorn and their own hand made ornaments can have deep meaning for children who feel the wound of abandonment and/or rejection from their parents. These gifts address both financial and the emotional stressors.

Even though your grandchildren may wish for a special pair of expensive sneakers, or brand name clothing or expensive technology, such as a cell phone, iPod, iPad, or Wii, they will always remember you "making" them something unique and special, something very special just for them, individually. They may feel disappointed in the moment, or maybe not, but in the long run, I guarantee you they will remember this Christmas as more special than any other.

Buying gifts is easy if you have the money, but making a gift that is unique for your individual grandchild is precious, and always remembered by them. This is a gift from your "heart" not from a store. It will always touch them because the gift is "from your heart to their heart." It does not get any better than that grandma and grandpa!

So, enjoy your Christmas, and remember, money is not the issue, LOVE is the real gift. May your Holidays be filled with many hugs, laughter and gratitude for the many gifts you and your grandchildren give each other throughout the year...not just at Hannukah, Christmas or Kwanza. Wishing you creative and happy holidays,

With Gratitude,  
Elaine



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# THE TWEEN YEARS: CHANGES AND CHALLENGES PART 1

By: Elaine K. Williams

It's common knowledge that the tween and teenage years can be hard on the parent-child relationship. It is easy for a parenting grandparent to become disheartened with their tween's defiance, ridicule, lack of gratitude and perhaps, even a snarky attitude. As children approach their tweens, they begin to push away from parental hugs and other expressions of affection. This is not an easy time for either the child or the grandparent.

The tween years are getting younger, but generally the ages of 11 and 12 constitute tweens. I will take a look at some of the changes that occur and the challenges parenting grandparents are likely to face. I will also discuss some of the things you can do to manage these years in a way that ensures successful movement through this developmental stage.

In this first of three blogs on this topic, I will look at the causes of tween attitude and what behaviors you are likely to see and have to deal with. In the second blog, I will focus on how to cope with and respond to tween attitude. In the final blog, I will address when the parenting grandparent may be part of the problem; and, when the attitude is a symptom of something else.

When your grandchild transitions into their tweens it can feel like a 'thud' for the grandparents. Their attitude can feel hurtful, insulting, discounting and often leave grandparents stunned. One of the most frequent errors parents can make is believing that their grandchild is fully aware of his behavior, tone of voice, defiance, and more. It is very important that grandparents not take their grandchild's behavior as a personal attack on them, and not believe their attitudes are intentionally mean.

That's not to say that grandparents should ignore or allow all rude and disrespectful behavior, however, it does mean you need to put on a thick skin. It is also important to remember this attitude is more about what the tween is experiencing and less about the grandparents themselves. Most of the tweens attitude can be attributed to:

1. Changes in the brain causing increased impulsivity and heightened emotions, leading them to get overly angry or sad out of proportion to the event, at least from the grandparent's perspective.
2. The tween needs to begin separating from their grandparents and forming their own identities. This is a huge first step to resolving the identity challenges they will face as teenagers.
3. A subconscious and developmental need for them to test the limits of their power and in so doing, get confirmation that their grandparents will reliably hold their ground and keep them safe.
4. The tween years make the beginning of their focusing and being distracted by their ever changing bodies and social world, and so they are not thinking about their grandparents' emotions, needs or reactions.

It is important for parenting grandparents to remember that while these undesirable tween behaviors should not be condoned, they are part of this stage of development and as such need to be managed in an understanding and consistent way.

# THE TWEEN YEARS: CHANGES AND CHALLENGES PART 2

By: Elaine K. Williams

Most parenting grandparents have said to me they could not get over the change in behavior of their grandchild when they turned 11, 12, or 13 years of age. "What happened?" is the repeated question. Well, if you read my first article on this topic, their bodies begin to physiologically change and their mental and emotional responses are now influenced by hormonal changes. These changes are overwhelming to the tween as well as the parenting grandparent. Consequently, it is important to remember not to take your tween's behavior personally.

So, let's focus on what you can expect behaviorally from your tween keeping in mind, *this too shall pass...but it will take a few years!*

## **Behaviors you might experience with your tween:**

- **Eye Rolling**
- **Sighs**
- **Back Talk**
- **Chronic Complaining**
- **Huffs and Puffs**
- **Nitpicking**
- **Criticizing**
- **Overreacting**
- **Challenging your values and beliefs**
- **Easily becoming anxious or angry or both**
- **Questioning why you do things the way you do**
- **Resistance to suggestions and requests**
- **Becoming secretive**
- **More demanding, etc.**

Typically, these behaviors will come and go. Tweens may be back talking one minute and genuinely kind and sweet the next. In many ways, this stage of development is much like the "terrible two's." Keep in mind however, these behaviors are a part of how they are developmentally wired. While challenging to their grandparents, it is actually healthy for tweens to express some of their feelings in this way in order to move to the next level of maturity.

In light of the various developmental causes of tween attitude, here are some recommendations for parenting grandparents to cope and manage their tweens new and complex developmental stage.

### Responding to Attitude

- Try not to react *immediately* to your tween's behavior.
- Remember this is just a phase and one that is required for your tween to progress to the next level of maturity.
- Focus on staying calm. Use some calming techniques such as: deep breathing, stepping outside for awhile, exercise, talking to a friend, etc.
- Keep your sense of humor.
- Choose carefully which issues to address in more depth at a later time. Sometimes the best response is the moment is no response. As a parenting grandparent you don't have to address every issue with your tween at the exact moment that it presents itself. It is in everyone's best interest to bring it up when everyone is calm and has had time to think about what happened and how it should be handled.

Perhaps, my most important recommendation is to use episodes of disrespectful behavior as teachable moments. Help your tween increase their awareness of what happens when their impulses control them and how their behavior impacts others. Identify and suggest other acceptable ways they can express themselves when they are upset or angry. This allows them to learn new coping skills that they can carry forward into their teen years and beyond.

Parenting grandparents can help tweens calm their responses by looking for opportunities to help them hear themselves; and, to realize the consequences of their attitudes and behaviors. For example: A parenting grandparent might say something like: "I know you are frustrated and we need to talk about this. Right now your tone of voice and your facial expressions are making it very hard for me to hear your point of view. Can you say that again without the tone?"

It may be hard to believe, but tweens are often unaware of their own tone of voice and do not hear the tone in the same way the grandparents hear it. Finally, as parenting grandparents, you are the role models and need to communicate in a way that you want your tween to emulate.

<http://www.elainekwilliams.com/2015/10/>

## THE TWEEN YEARS: CHANGES AND CHALLENGES PART 3

By: Elaine K. Williams

In my final blog on tween changes and challenges, I take a look at how easy it is for us as grandparents to contribute to or exacerbate our tween's attitude; and also, I'll discuss when typical tween attitude becomes more serious and reflects a deeper problem. At the ages of 11, 12 and 13, tweens are beginning a stage of development whereby they need to sort out their own identity, which means they explore their independence and develop a sense of self. If they are not successful exploring who they are, what they believe and value, than they are left in a state of confusion which contributes to feelings of insecurity as they grow older.

While the tween and teen attitude must be taken with a grain of salt and a sound understanding of how it fits into their stage of development, it's wise to look at each individual situation to confirm that the attitude isn't a symptom of a bigger problem. As you evaluate the situation, remember to take a look at how your own behavior may be contributing to the problem.

The following questions can help parenting grandparents determine if your behavior is helping to turn down the tone in the household or making it worse:

- Are you distracted by your own problems and prone to feeling impatient and tense? If so, it is important you find ways and times to relax yourself, so that you feel more calm and attentive when talking to your tween. It's okay to say: "This is not a good time for me, I am distracted, but let's talk after dinner when I can give you my undivided attention."
- Do you talk with your grandchild respectfully? Even if you're angry? Since grandparents/parents are role models, regulating your emotions is important and it keeps the conflict from escalating.
- Do you react to your grandchild's attitude with your own attitude? While this is an understandable human reaction, it only results in heightening the conflict and rarely leads to a satisfactory resolution.
- Do you engage with your tween's sassy attitude in any way? The pouting, sulking, and complaints about how unfair life is are powerful hooks that easily pull grandparents in. Giving increased attention to this behavior usually just exacerbates it.
- Do you overreact to your tween's attitude? If so, this may indicate that there are problems outside the parent-child relationship that need to be addressed. Grandparents may be reacting to external stressors, internal conflicts, or bigger issues in the family that require attention.
- Do you call for a timeout to calm things down when your tween's attitude escalates? You can revisit the situation later, when you are both in a better place. Also, it is critical to convey you want to understand what is bothering them which means you employ really good listening skills. Good listening means you seek to understand without judging, assuming or interrupting. This is one of the best ways to manage your tween's attitude, as it validates their feelings and conveys you care.

When grandparents realize they are taking their tween's attitude too personally and getting their buttons pushed continually, it may be time for some outside help from a trusted friend or counselor.

### **When Attitude is a Symptom of Something Else**

Here are signs to be aware of that might indicate your tween's attitude is reflective of a more serious problem:

- The irritability and disrespect doesn't just happen at home, but consistently occurs with other adults and peers.
- Your grandchild's attitude causes problems in school or with friendships outside the home.
- You notice other changes in your child's behavior, such as decreased interest in activities, loss of friends, or changes in school performance.

One of the biggest indicators that something more serious is going on, is when people who have always complemented your grandchild, teachers, coaches, friends, parents, neighbors etc., start asking you "what is wrong with your grandchild?" Even when you get attitude and sass at home, most of the time your tweens are managing quite fine with friends and adults outside your home. In fact, you might even get compliments about their behaviors causing you to scratch your head and ask: "Why don't I see those pleasant behaviors at home?"

Usually tweens share "attitude" with those they trust and who they know will love them no matter how obnoxious their attitude or behaviors may be. Implement some of the suggestions above, which focus more on how you respond to your tween, and know that for most of you in about 5-7 years you will be the proud grandparent/parent of a teen who has a good sense of self and is confident.

On the other hand, if you suspect deeper problems going on, do not hesitate to seek therapy or counseling for your tween. The younger they are when they receive intervention, the better is their prognosis for improvement.

# GrandParents Raising Grandchildren Support Group

**Confidential conversation and sharing of financial and educational resources with peer caregivers and professional facilitators  
the LAST TUESDAY of the month from  
9 AM to 11 AM at  
Rose City Senior Center  
8 Mahan Drive, Norwich, CT 06360**

## 2022-2023 Schedule

December 27, 2022 | January 31, 2023 | February 28, 2023

March 28, 2023 | April 25, 2023 | May 30, 2023

June 27, 2023 | July 25, 2023

### **Inclement Weather Policy:**

Meetings will be cancelled if public schools or the senior center are closed or delayed.



19 Ohio Avenue, Suite 2  
Norwich, CT 06360  
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800-690-6998  
[www.SeniorResourcesEC.org](http://www.SeniorResourcesEC.org)



Norwich Youth & Family  
Services  
75 Mohegan Road  
Norwich, CT 06360  
860-823-3782  
[www.NorwichCT.org](http://www.NorwichCT.org)



Rose City  
Senior Center  
8 Mahan Drive  
Norwich, CT 06360  
860-889-5960  
[www.NorwichCT.org](http://www.NorwichCT.org)

# Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Groups

## **Senior Resources Agency on Aging**

Sally Huck, Caregiver Program Coordinator  
(860)887-3561 x126  
Rose City Senior Center  
8 Mahan Drive, Norwich  
Last Tuesday of each month, 9:00 a.m.

## **Eastern CT Area – Mansfield**

Janit Romayko (860)569-1978, Call to Register  
Big Y Mansfield, 141 Storrs Road, Mansfield Center  
2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of each month, 9:15 a.m.

## **United Services - Kinship Support Group**

Plainfield Area  
Lori Bergstrom, Prevention Services Manager  
(860)412-8665 [lbergstrom@usmhs.org](mailto:lbergstrom@usmhs.org)  
United Services, 303 Putnam Road, Wauregan  
2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of each month, 5:00 – 6:30 p.m.



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We hope you find this month's edition of our Caregiver of Children newsletter informative.

Senior Resources currently produces a monthly caregiver of children newsletter. We are looking for feedback on any ideas you may have for future editions.

Please contact Sally Huck with any ideas/suggestions or if you wish to be removed from our mailing list.

Sally Huck: [SHuck@seniorresourcesec.org](mailto:SHuck@seniorresourcesec.org) or 860 887-3561 x 126.

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