MEETING THE CHALLENGE
OF RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

More grandparents are raising grandchildren than ever before. The predictable problems they experience include a revision of personal goals; learning how growing up has changed since they raised their own children; cooperating with the parent who shares responsibility for child care; monitoring social and academic progress of children; becoming aware of rights and available social services; and arranging periodic relief from the daily demands of their surrogate obligations. Full-time grandparents often rely on support groups for comfort and advice. The advantages and limitations of this approach are examined. Recommendations are made for ways to improve how support groups function so they can achieve their purposes.

The authors have tried to assess the potential of grandparents and sought ways to help them become more successful. This effort spanning two decades has included studies of large and culturally diverse samples. Based upon these investigations, we formulated the first curriculum for grandparents; constructed instruments to detect their family learning needs and evaluate effects of intervention; trained leaders from many countries to deliver grandparent instruction; and devised a theory of grandparent development to guide implementation and evaluation of programs (Strom & Strom, 1991a,b; 1992; 1993b; 1995; 1997; 1998; Strom et al. 1995; 1996a,b; 1997).
EXPECTATIONS OF GRANDPARENTS

Many participants in our grandparent classes express the belief that the importance of their role is declining because of uncertainty about what should be expected of them in the emerging environment. Some maintain changing times have caused them to lose touch with the way younger relatives see things and feel about the world. Others are disappointed because they are left out of family decision making and do not get enough time with their loved ones. On the other hand, parents frequently tell us that the contribution grandparents make is minimal because elders are preoccupied with the pursuit of self-interests. Most mothers and fathers in our parent education courses report feeling overwhelmed with all they have to do and would welcome assistance from older relatives in raising the children (Strom & Strom, 1997).

In stark contrast, a much smaller segment of grandparents present a different story (American Association of Retired Persons, 1997). They view their role as being important because it requires them to take care of grandchildren on a daily basis. Their desire to effectively substitute for parents is common (de Toledo & Brown, 1996). The possibilities for these grandparents to succeed can increase whenever professionals help them to recognize the adjustments they must make, encourage setting new goals that are consistent with their present circumstance, and improve how support groups function so that they offer encouragement, instruction, and feedback on personal progress.

LIVING WITH GRANDPARENTS

Children living with grandparents is not a new phenomenon. But, there is growing concern because grandparent-headed households in the United States have increased by 40 percent during the past decade. More than four million children are involved in this kind of a family arrangement (Saluter, 1996). There are many conditions that can lead grandparents to assume the full time care of their grandchildren. An unmarried teenager might become a parent or a parent goes through a divorce, loses a job, requires free child care, develops an addiction to alcohol or illegal drugs, abuses their daughter or son, is sent to jail, suffers an illness, or dies.

People of all ethnic and income groups experience these problems. However, the incidence is far greater among low-income and minority families. Although Caucasians are the majority (52%) of all households headed by grandparents, a higher percentage of African American (12%) and Hispanic (6%) children than Caucasians (4%) live with grandparents (Saluter, 1996). Regardless of why younger relatives live with them or the economic hardships they must endure, grandparents who raise their grandchildren want to provide a stable and supportive environment (Kornhaber, 1996).
**Grandparent Goals for Raising Grandchildren**

Knowing someone else's goals makes it easier to understand her or him. Such knowledge also reduces the inclination to misinterpret intentions or reach unfair conclusions about how well that person is doing. For these reasons, it is useful to consider the goals successful grandparents raising grandchildren appear to have in common. Specifically, they aspire to 1) revise their personal goals to fit the present circumstance; 2) learn how growing up has changed since they raised their own sons and daughters; 3) cooperate with the parent who shares responsibility for child care; 4) monitor the social and academic progress of children; and 5) arrange periodic relief from the heavy demands of their role. Grandparents who realize the benefits of achieving these goals are more motivated to pursue them.

**Revise Personal Goals and Maintain Optimism**

It has been our observation that resistance to this goal is most often demonstrated by middle-income Caucasians. Their opposition stems from the belief that caring for a grandchild requires a loss of their freedom. They waited a long time for their children to grow up, supposing it would then be possible to devote attention to personal interests and ambitions. Maybe they had plans to travel, become more involved in hobbies, or do things with their spouse or friends. Perhaps they imagined that the grandparent role would consist of fun visits, occasional babysitting, and indulging their grandchildren. But these dreams never came true because daughters or sons were unable to manage their own affairs. Even the future appears uncertain when there is no way to forecast how long they will have to raise someone else's child. The extraordinary demands on their time, energy, and finances result in great strain (Jendrek, 1993, 1994; Kornhaber, 1996).

Grandparents sometimes experience anger for being placed in a surrogate role with extensive responsibilities. Feelings of resentment toward those who created the situation, guilt about things they might have done wrong as a parent, and doubts about their ability to manage by themselves are quite common. Grandma Rose states her ambivalence: "I don't know if God thought that I did a poor job and wanted to give me a second chance, or thought I did well enough to be given the task one more time. My daughter says she can't handle her children anymore but maybe I won't be able to manage them either."

Grandparents are beset with mixed emotions. They feel a sense of sadness for grandchildren and also sense personal isolation from old friends who seem incapable of comprehending their important and uncommon mission. Some are depressed over having to relinquish the retirement goal of being relatively free from responsibilities toward others. Despite these misgivings, most grandparents affirm that they would take the same path again and come to the aid of grandchildren (Robertson & Johnson, 1997).

Grandparents who raise grandchildren must adopt goals that fit their guidance function. Otherwise, they remain locked in a state of regret and disappointment.
about being unable to attain their earlier aspirations which are no longer appropriate. A related danger is that the grandchildren will feel unwanted and perceive themselves as an obstacle to grandparent happiness. Such youngsters may be better off living with someone else who can help them feel wanted and instill a real sense of belonging. This means that, in certain cases, foster care might be a more healthy option than care provided in a grudging way by relatives.

Hope is always difficult to acquire in a pessimistic environment. People who are hopeful generally do not have greater knowledge than other people do about the future. However, they are able to sense positive possibilities based on the same evidence that others rely on to support their despair. This favorable outlook reinforces mental health. To prepare children for the complex future they will encounter, it is essential to preserve a strong sense of hope. At every age in life hopeful people are the ones who seek constructive solutions to their problems.

Research shows that optimists do better academically, in athletics, and at the workplace because they cheerfully persist when confronted with setbacks while pessimists having equal ability give up or choose to portray themselves as victims. In a study of corporate productivity at Met Life, Seligman (1992) discovered that optimistic sales people outsold their pessimistic peers by more than a third and optimism was identified as a better predictor of employee value to the company than any of the other standard measures. If optimism can have this favorable impact on performance in the workplace, there is reason to believe it can also be an influential factor for women and men bringing up grandchildren.

Children exposed to high levels of pessimism are at greater risk for depression and losing a creative capacity to see possibilities, including their own happiness. A sense of optimism is a vital asset to children and it should be continually reinforced by grandparents who rely on it as their fundamental attitude toward life and daily affairs. Grandchildren should be regularly told by grandparents that helping them to grow up is a source of great satisfaction (Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995).

**Learn how Growing up has Changed**

Grandparents who underestimate what it takes to provide effective guidance are bound to disadvantage grandchildren. The suggestion that they attend a grandparent class should not be misinterpreted by them. Instead of reacting defensively and supposing the recommendation is an insult to their many years of experience, it is wiser to perceive the compliment others intend when they acknowledge their capacity to grow and desire to succeed with a new role. It should be expected that, as the growing up process changes, some parenting practices will shift too. Grandparents should be aware of the goals that today’s parents have and realize how these differ from the priorities held during the past. It is helpful to acquire alternative forms of discipline to the use of corporal punishment, be aware of the norms for a grandchild’s peer group, and be prepared to work with teachers at school.
It is unreasonable to suppose that willingness to raise a grandchild and loving the child are the only qualities which are needed to fulfill this complicated role. Success always depends on good intentions but it also requires knowing the predictable difficulties children experience and ways to help them cope with personal problems. Older relatives who recognize the link between their self-improvement and the well-being of grandchildren are eager to gain the insights and emotional strength which is required to succeed (Strom, 1996).

Cooperate with the Parent who Shares Responsibility for Child Care

Reports on surrogate childrearing are sometimes misleading since they imply such grandparents are without any family resources. On the contrary, in two-thirds of families where grandparents are the main caretakers, one of the child's parents lives in the same house (American Association of Retired Persons, 1997). This situation can arise when an unwed teenager has a baby. Each year nearly a million teenagers get pregnant in the United States. About 70 percent of them give birth and 95 percent decide to keep their babies (Saluter, 1996). Usually maternal grandmothers assume responsibility for child care while the young mother completes high school or goes to work. This arrangement frequently includes spoken and hidden conflict between the two women as each of them attempt to build their own satisfying relationship with the child.

An example of problems in the mother-daughter relationship is portrayed by Carmen who got pregnant at age sixteen. Her mother, Esther, agreed to take care of Juan so Carmen could get a general education certificate. That was four years ago, and Carmen still lives at home. Grandma Esther and grandson Juan spend most of their time together and get along well. When Carmen returns home from work she is tired out, routinely denies Juan's request for play, and yells at him for acting in ways she does not like. This response causes Juan to look for comfort from grandma Esther. Carmen admits that this behavior makes her feel jealous and guilty about being impatient. Sometimes Carmen tries to regain Juan's favor by suspending Esther's rule about not having snacks after supper.

Carmen's behavior resembles non-custodial grandparents who spend too little time with grandchildren. They seldom have sufficient responsibilities for teaching or discipline. Therefore, they spoil the grandchildren instead of encouraging them to mature by reinforcing the rules of parents for proper behavior. But, in this family the roles have been reversed. It is Esther, Juan's grandparent, who is distraught by the permissive behavior of her daughter Carmen. Esther believes that because she is the one who takes care of Juan most of the time, Carmen should show support for her rules instead of contradicting them.

Both women need well-defined responsibilities they can agree on. Complimentary roles are essential so Juan can benefit from a stable environment, knowing that both women love him and share similar expectations for his behavior. One way
to increase continuity is by establishing support groups for young parents who live in grandparent headed households. Efforts to unite the adult generations are uncommon but have the potential to produce greater benefit for everyone than supposing that grandparents are the only parties needing support.

Sometimes grandmothers have more mature interpretations of events than young parents. Betty points out, "My daughter Lisa lives with us. Her five-year-old son, Bobby, is a good boy who I take care of while Lisa goes to school. But Bobby's father has never paid the court ordered support. Still he comes around on birthdays and holiday to give Bobby a pinata or other gifts. My daughter gets angry because Bobby likes his dad and she wants to tell him 'your father is a jerk.' When this happened last week, my advice to Lisa was, "I realize you feel bad that Bobby is impressed by his dad despite the fact that he is an irresponsible man. But, in time, Bobby will consider who does the laundry, feeds him, gives daily care, and is available whenever needed—his mom and grandma. So try not to be so disappointed with Bobby's present conclusions. The time Bobby's father invests in him compared to your own will be evaluated more fairly later on. Remember too, Bobby can use all the affection he can get right now. So, both of us should stop saying hurtful things about his dad. Someday Bobby will make up his own mind about the support he has and will recognize the people who can be counted on."

**Monitor the Social and Academic Progress of Children**

Children raised by grandparents sometimes suffer from emotional problems. Feelings of rejection and abandonment by parents trigger depression. In certain cases child anger may be directed toward those least likely to strike back, their grandparents. Caretakers often fail to recognize when a grandchild needs professional counseling to cope with the distress and maladjustment that accompany dysfunctional family relationships. They tend to assume that asking for help will raise questions about their own competence (Solomon & Marx, 1995). Elementary students tend to blame themselves for the absence of a parent and may be fearful that the grandparents will leave too. Hostility toward parents is sometimes redirected to classmates. Children who are preoccupied by problems tend to daydream so they do not pay enough attention to lessons. As a result, falling behind is common, particularly in subject matters such as mathematics where knowledge is cumulative (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996). In these cases, tutoring is necessary to catch up. Some grandparents worry that getting a poor report card and continued lack of self-control could be the beginning of serious troubles for their grandchild. They are correct and need to involve others who can help them overcome emerging problems.

Most grandparents express uncertainty about how teachers expect them to support child learning in the classroom. Going to PTA meetings where parents are much younger than themselves reinforces the idea that grandparents do not belong.
Conferencing with a child's teachers can identify difficulties for mutual attention and can guide cooperative efforts. Administrators and faculty are wise to suggest that grandparent support groups meet at the school and offer to identify people who will serve as resources regarding selected topics. Our studies have produced guidelines for establishing grandparent education councils in schools (Strom & Strom, 1995).

**Become Aware of Rights and Available Social Services**

Grandparents do not anticipate paying the expenses for bringing up grandchildren. However, this is frequently the circumstance when parents are unable to fulfill their obligations. Typically, such parents earn low incomes so they cannot provide much financial help. Then too, economic support may not be available from aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives who may be having a tough time dealing with their own survival. In an investigation of sixty African-American grandparents who were raising grandchildren, 97 percent reported that they received no consistent financial or other support from the extended family to supplement their childrearing funds (Burton, Dilworth-Anderson, & Meriwether-de Vries, 1995). These difficulties are reflected by estimates that the annual income among grandparents raising grandchildren is approximately half that of a nuclear family with children (Hanson, Browne, & Booth, 1995).

It appears that grandparents have to become well informed about public services to which they are entitled and aware of how to access these resources. Only one-third of grandparent-headed families get aid from state agencies. Social workers are the key allies in these matters. Many grandparents can obtain a monthly federal grant and students in low-income families get free meals at school. On the other hand, some schools charge tuition unless one of the child's parents lives within the district or evidence is provided to confirm grandparents have court assigned guardianship for a grandchild. Our recommendation for dealing with this situation is to submit a letter of petition to the school board. This will most likely result in an exception to the general policy. Unfortunately, insurance policies which routinely include medical and dental coverage for minor age children exclude grandchildren unless grandparents have legal custody (Kirkland, 1997).

There are times when it is necessary to protect grandchildren from their own parents. Children have historically suffered at the hands of fathers and mothers intoxicated by alcohol. But now dangerous mind-altering drugs such as cocaine and heroin also endanger families. In fact, drug and alcohol abuse along with the related problems of child mistreatment and neglect are the two most common reasons why grandparents have to bring up their grandchildren. Drug addicts lose the capacity to care for children and themselves. The size of the parent population consuming illegal drugs is unknown but the attendant dangers for children are bound to continue in the future (Califano, 1998).
When Denise became addicted to cocaine she left her eight-year-old son Jason with his grandmother Edith. At the time Edith took charge of Jason, she supposed this was a temporary task until Denise was able to complete the rehabilitation program. Three years passed with no phone calls. Then one day Denise unexpectedly showed up at the front door to request money so that she could get job training. At first Edith said no because intuition told her the money would be used for drugs. However, when Denise threatened to take Jason, Edith relented and withdrew 800 dollars from the bank to pay for job training. Ever since then Edith has worried that one day Denise will return to blackmail her again or to abduct Jason. It appears that the only way to guarantee Jason's safety and security is to petition the court for legal custody. This will be the most emotionally difficult thing Edith has ever done because she must prove to a judge that her daughter Denise is an unfit parent. If Edith wins custody she can also lose any possibility of ever restoring a favorable relationship with her daughter Denise. A battle in court will be expensive and is likely to deplete the funds Edith has set aside for her retirement.

**Arrange Relief from Daily Responsibilities**

Grandparents feel exhausted by the wide range of tasks they must perform. Sometimes, instead of pacing themselves and accepting the fact that certain chores may have to wait, people overlook their own health and psychological needs. They fail to realize that their mental fitness and physical stamina must be preserved to remain an effective source of support for grandchildren. It is important to schedule rest, hobbies, and opportunities to learn. Regular exercise can counteract depression and reinforce a positive outlook. Learning to cope with continuous stress while feeling a sense of control in the important sectors of life can prevent grandparents from giving up or becoming abusive to children. In some cases relief has to take the form of individual counseling from a therapist.

Spending time alone while other trusted adults look after the grandchildren can allow grandparents the reprieve needed to recover their perspective and renew motivation. These goals to obtain relief are modest for the purpose of doing errands, attending a religious service, going to the hairdresser, or visiting with friends. Nevertheless, some grandparents must forego relief because no relatives are available to help or those willing to act as caregivers are unreliable and cannot be trusted. Free respite care is a service that all churches and synagogues should consider as part of their community mission (Jendrek, 1993, 1994).

**Goals for Grandparent Support Groups**

Grandparents raising grandchildren are often encouraged to join a support group. Hundreds of these groups have been established and are identified by names like Grandparents as Parents, Second Time Around Parents, Grandparents Raising their Grandchildren, Grandmothers as Mothers Again, and Raising Our
Children's Kids. Support groups usually consist of five to twenty members with leadership assumed by grandparents themselves. Participants believe that spending time with their peers who face similar challenges will reduce feelings of isolation, provide mutual comfort, and offer solutions for common problems. Sometimes the groups' purposes also include informing lawmakers regarding injustices to grandparents or urging the introduction of welfare reforms which implicate custody and visitation. These initiatives have improved public awareness and the policies of courts and family agencies (de Toledo & Brown, 1996; Kornhaber, 1996).

The benefits for people involved with support groups have been poorly documented. These groups seldom receive external funding so there are no accountability demands to evaluate outcomes. However, national leaders who were instrumental in establishing grandparent networks have identified their own concerns (Slorah & Kirkland, 1993). Most difficulties they have detected could be overcome by implementing the following goals: 1) encourage optimistic attitudes and constructive behavior, 2) establish expectations for the growth of every member, 3) acquire and practice group process skills, 4) make education the basis for becoming more successful, and 5) assess members' learning needs and evaluate development.

**Encourage Optimistic Attitudes and Constructive Behavior**

Support groups are often ineffective because of the format that encourages complaining but fails to offer opportunities for growth. Members suppose it is therapeutic to express disappointments to those who will avoid judging them. Support group leaders recognize the dangers that often flow from this behavior pattern: "I come home after our meetings emotionally drained from listening to everyone." "I disapprove of the inclination people have to pool their hostility." "I have to limit the amount of time for sharing feelings to one in every three meetings or else the attendance drops off. People just can't take it more often than that." "I'm uncertain about what to do with people who appear more interested in expressing endless complaints than making adjustments in their lives." "Those who achieve success usually stop coming to meetings so we never get to talk about what it takes to be successful."

These observations of national support group founders illustrate why reform is necessary. It is vital to replace the outlook causing members to see themselves as victims who can benefit from taking turns presenting sorrows, listening to the disappointment of others, and reassuring one another that troubles are bound to end. Rather, the attitude that ought to permeate a support group calls on everyone to contribute hope by sharing their small victories, identifying short-term goals, recounting humorous things that happen, and reminding each other of good things in their lives.
When a favorable outlook prevails, successful people do not stop attending support meetings to avoid listening to the complaints. They continue to come so they can share their strength and build confidence in others. The choice of attitude matters because, more than any other ingredient, attitude governs the expectations and behaviors a group can produce. Mental health depends on replacing corrosive emotions like anger, hatred, and bitterness as soon as possible with an outlook that is hopeful and healthy.

**Establish Growth Expectations for Every Member**

Participants should understand the developmental sequence that is expected of everyone who attends the group. The format we recommend consists of three stages. During the first stage, grandparents attempt to describe the difficulties they experience and listen carefully to others who tell about the progress they are making in overcoming problems. At the outset participants usually express anger, disappointment, blame, hopelessness, and self-pity. The tendency to portray oneself as a victim is common. Three or four sessions can be devoted to stage one behavior and adjustment into the group.

During stage two, people are expected to enlarge their focus, to go beyond detailing unpleasant events and discontent to begin activation of constructive self-evaluation. Individuals are expected to reflect out loud, to identify factors they have the power to change. The reason for this shift is that it motivates grandparents to modify their impression that circumstances cannot be changed in favor of a recognition that certain things are subject to self control. Stage two people are expected to identify ways they handle problems instead of perpetually describing problems. At this stage, the function of other group members involves more than listening. They help generate options to broaden the basis of personal choice. Another important function of the support group is to monitor the logic of each member about the possible outcomes of their choices, present ways of looking at situations that individuals may not recognize, and encourage the productive use of energy. The duration of this stage is three or four sessions.

By the time most people have attended six to eight sessions, they are ready to move on to stage three. Here the emphasis is on clarifying personal goals, sharing evidence of progress, describing setbacks, and formulating ways to revise unsuccessful efforts. Stage three people are prepared to accept the full range of their responsibilities as surrogates and demonstrate healthy adjustment to daily challenges. They describe how they cope with obstacles and are no longer hindered by the earlier concentration on feelings of bitterness or regret. Stage three people are living proof that adversity can be overcome through encouragement, creativity, and perseverance. Although they could leave the support group, stage three people often remain as mentors to help others who still struggle to progress beyond stages one and two.

Sometimes grandparents are unable to make the progress which is expected of them. Becoming stalled often relates to depression (Goetzel, 1998). When people
become depressed they lose the perspective that is necessary to consider alternative courses of action. In such cases, it is important to acknowledge that attending a support group is an insufficient way to produce improvement. Getting the person to contact a therapist and schedule individual sessions is more appropriate. Some older adults are reluctant to seek counseling because they retain misconceptions about this form of treatment. Accordingly, group members should be oriented to the nature and the benefits of clinical assistance. In addition, support group leaders require training so they can detect when persons fail to make progress.

It is relevant to acknowledge that treatment for psychological illnesses like depression significantly reduce the cost of health care. Researchers studied 46,000 workers from six large companies over a three-year period (Goetzel, 1998). Each person completed a survey about their health habits such as physical activity, exercise, alcoholic intake, eating patterns, use of tobacco, exposure to stress, and experience with depression. While 20 percent reported high levels of stress, only 2 percent acknowledged depression. It was found that those who were depressed cost their health care providers 70 percent more than did non-depressed peers. Health care costs for patients with high levels of stress were 46 percent greater than for those reporting lower stress levels. That grandparents who raise their grandchildren experience disproportionately high levels of stress, as well as depression, is a familiar observation (de Toledo & Brown, 1996).

Support groups should include participants from every stage of expectation. Otherwise, some people become locked in stage one and rendered incapable of moving forward because their expectations are inappropriate. When members view the support group as a forum in which they consistently express negative feelings, peers cannot be helpful. This is the main reason people who make breakthroughs give for leaving a group. Most of them report that it was necessary to walk away to preserve their mental health (Slorah & Kirkland, 1993).

**Acquire and Practice Group Process Skills**

National leaders of support groups report difficulties in knowing how to respond to participants who monopolize conversations, rationing time so that everyone has some opportunity to express themselves, intervening when someone is critical of another member, keeping people focused on main issues, and terminating arguments between factions seeking to impose their agenda on the entire group. Leaders wish that the participants would assume more responsibility to make the group experience productive for everyone. However, interviews with participants reveal a fairly uniform impression that the leaders are supposed to handle all problems when they arise. These expectations exempt the members from sharing the obligation to monitor group process and grow from the experience.

When today's grandparents were children, peers were less often seen as a significant source of guidance. Reading and listening to the teachers were considered the important ways to learn. Conversation with peers in class was thought to be a
Wasted oftme, discouraged, and treated as misbehavior. Consequently, grandparents did not acquire the group process skills that are routinely taught to students now. These skills are important because they enable dialogue among peers and stimulate respectful communication between the generations. Support groups should help members acquire and practice the social skills associated with sharing feelings and ideas, staying focused on a topic, yielding to other speakers, showing respect for opinions with which they disagree, challenging sources of information, reminding peers when comments become repetitious, and relying on brainstorming to generate worthwhile options for solving problems. Our studies have produced guidelines to help grandparents gain these skills (Strom & Strom, 1993a).

**Make Education the Basis for Becoming More Successful**

Grandparents need a broader understanding of their role than can be provided by peers. A powerful way to stimulate individual growth is by including an educational component that augments the emphasis on sharing experiences. This means scheduling half of every meeting for a learning activity or alternating the focus of whole sessions so that self-disclosure, feedback from the group, and education needs can all be met.

The Illinois Department of Aging surveyed 350 among the 70,000 grandparents from that state who have grandchildren living with them (Lindley, 1996). Most felt that their present living arrangement would be permanent. When asked to describe their involvement with support groups, 13 percent indicated they attended; 9 percent could not attend because transportation was lacking; 15 percent could not because child care was lacking; 17 percent expressed interest in joining sometime; 20 percent were not interested; and 26 percent stated they were too busy.

The Illinois survey prioritized issues that grandparents thought were important for them to learn. The most to least important topics they wanted to know more about were: education of grandchildren, up-to-date parenting skills, handling financial issues, finding suitable child care, dealing with substance abuse treatment, health insurance, concerns regarding health, emotional counseling, and legal issues.

It was recognized that the priority of what grandparents need to know should include consideration of the opinions held by younger relatives. So, grandchildren of the adult respondents were asked to rank order the topics and add others to indicate what they felt grandparents should learn (Lindley, 1996). From the most to least important topics, boys and girls identified education of children, finding suitable child care, up-to-date parenting skills, emotional counseling, financial issues, legal issues, health insurance, and substance abuse treatment.

Both generations assigned the highest priority to education of children and learning contemporary childrearing and parenting practices. These outcomes confirm the need for an instructional component in support groups and urge cooperation with faculty and administrators at school to arrange professional input and ensure a worthwhile curriculum.
Determine Learning Needs and Evaluate Progress

The learning needs of support group members should be identified so that a curriculum can be arranged for them. We have devised survey instruments for parents that can also be used with grandparents. Those who take care of pre-school or primary grade children from three to nine years of age complete the *Parent As A Teacher Inventory* (Strom, 1995). The fifty Likert-type items reveal how grandparents feel about their interaction with a grandchild, the priority they assign to specific child behaviors, and their understanding of how to facilitate growth in young children. These five conditions are examined: 1) Creativity—adult acceptance of a child's imagination and the willingness to encourage it; 2) Frustration—child behaviors which cause an adult to become upset; 3) Control—child actions which the adult feels a need to control; 4) Play—understanding of fantasy and its influence on mental development; and 5) Teaching/Learning—views about ways to provide instruction and self-impression of capacity to offer a supportive home environment for children. Each grandparent gets feedback on their personal responses in a profile that summarizes assets and behaviors where further growth is warranted.

Another instrument, the *Parent Success Indicator*, was designed to help parents often to fourteen year olds (Strom & Strom, 1998). There is one version for adults to make known their self-impressions of parenting assets and limitations and another version for adolescents to report observations of a particular adult with responsibility for their care. Both generations complete the same sixty items that explore six aspects of their relationship: 1) Communication—skills of advising and learning from adolescents; 2) Use of Time—making decisions about the way time is spent; 3) Teaching—the scope of guidance which is expected of adults; 4) Frustration—adolescent attitudes and behaviors that bother adults; 5) Satisfaction—aspects of raising an adolescent that give satisfaction; and 6) Information Needs—things adults need to know about a child they are raising. Children are assured that their answers will never be shown to the parent or grandparent who takes care of them. Caretakers get a profile which interprets self-ratings for all items and provides normative ratings that are reported by their grandchild's peer group.

A third alternative measure is called the *Grandparent Strengths and Needs Inventory* (Strom & Strom, 1993b). Effectiveness of the grandparent is determined by responses to sixty items that portray: 1) Satisfaction—aspects of being a grandparent which are pleasing; 2) Success—ways that grandparents successfully perform their role; 3) Teaching—scope of learning grandparents are expected to provide; 4) Difficulty—problems associated with grandparenting obligations; 5) Frustration—grandchild behaviors that upset grandparents; and 6) Information—things that should be known about grandchildren.

This inventory has three versions. Grandparents report self-impressions while parents and grandchildren report observations about a particular grandparent. The reason for using multiple sources is that a broad perspective of interaction offers a
more comprehensive picture of grandparent competence. If someone is bringing up an elementary or high school age grandchild on their own, one or both generations can complete this survey. When one of that child's parents live in the same house with the grandparent and grandchild, their perceptions should be sought as well. It is vital to assure parents and grandchildren that their answers will never be shown to the older relatives. Instead, each grandparent gets a profile that helps them interpret self-ratings for all items along with normative ratings of the parent and grandchild peer group. To preserve confidentiality, ensure accurate scoring, and prepare the feedback profile, we recommend that a school psychologist be requested to administer whichever inventories are chosen.

All three of these surveys can be obtained from Scholastic Testing Service in Chicago (phone 1 800 642 6787). Information on studies that have made use of the instruments to detect learning needs and evaluate the progress of individuals and groups can be found on the Arizona State University Office of Parent Development International Web site at www.public.asu.edu/~rdstrom

CONCLUSION

Grandparents who raise grandchildren recognize that they are needed. However, some of them do not realize that their success will require them to set new goals. Belonging to a support group offers benefit when there is an emphasis on linking optimistic attitudes and constructive behavior; all members are expected to progress through successive growth stages; everyone is provided with opportunities to practice group process communication skills; individual learning needs are determined with progress monitored; and worthwhile instruction is presented on ways to bring up healthy children.

REFERENCES


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