

THE PARENTS' CHAT ROOM

By: Dr. Maulik Trivedi



Q: Dear Dr. Trivedi,

I have been married to my husband for 6 years and we have a wonderful 5 year old son. Unlike most Indian families, we live by ourselves even though both the sets of grandparents live within 20 miles. We try to have our son spend a few hours on weekends with both the grandparents. My

husband's parents get very upset if I am not able to take Rahul (our son) to their home on the decided upon day. Rahul is now older, he has birthday parties and playdates and he does not always want to go to the grandparents' home. My mom understands and does not give me grief. My husband's mother on the other hand, taunts us about it, tells my son that. "oh, you don't love me, you love your friends more etc." and it hurts everybody's feelings. I have tried to reason with them but I am at my wits' end and have no idea how to deal with this situation! Please help!

A: In most cultures, family relations have the potential to lead to sticky scenarios. Being Indian is no different. Most of the time, having ready accessibility to grandparents works out to be a win-win scenario for the child, the parents as well as the grandparents. Parents can count on the grandparents to be reliable, trust-worthy and always eager baby-sitters. The child can experience unconditional love from grandparents while the grandparents get to savor the joys of grand-parenting. This scenario is likely to have more proven positives than negatives in the bigger picture.

Nevertheless, your dilemma is a frequently encountered situation in multigenerational family interactions. Everyone feels the strong bond with the child and wants to get as much time as possible with the child. Sometimes, the loving bond shared between a child and a grandparent can lead to awkward situations like the one you describe. One grandparent's perception of missing out on their fair share of the quantity or quality of your child's time leads them to cry foul. The situation does need to be addressed, albeit, sensitively.

First, acknowledge the grandparent's needs by positively reframing the seemingly taunting remarks. Addressing a taunt with the anticipated defensive remark only validates the negative interaction making it last longer and repeat itself. You always have the option to address a taunt with unexpectedness kindness. You may reply to this grandparent by saying something like, "It is so nice to have grandparents who have so much love to offer our child." Simultaneously, you can express sincere interest in assuring that both sets of grandparents have equal and open access to their grandchild while allowing time for the child to attend to his social calendar. You might offer this grandparent some feasible options for opportunities to spend more time with the child. For example, you might encourage them to partake in some of your child's social activities. You can also involve the grandparent in volunteering at your child's school as a way to get to spend more time with the child. Since you all live close by, you may come up with ways

to involve the grandparents in one of your child's after school activities.

As the involved grandparent begins to participate and interact with the child in his growing daily routine, they will feel more involved. The child will have stronger family ties and loving atmosphere and you will have a helping hand, and hopefully, some extra free time. The taunting and awkwardness has a potential to melt away in this atmosphere of welcoming family spirit and validated feelings. Good luck.

Q: Dear Dr. Trivedi,

I am 16 years old, I have a girlfriend and we are planning to move in together when we are in college. I think her parents will be cool with it, mine will have my hide! I can try to lie to them, but I know they will find out because 3 of their friends' kids will be at the same university and someone or the other will tell. How should I approach this with my parents? They are very conservative; they get mad at me even when they see a girl talking to me!

A: To be 16 is full of wonder along with a new sense of mastery over life and ever-increasing need to be independent. It is truly a special experience, and everyone passes through the stage that you are currently experiencing. Amusingly, most people who have hit adulthood would agree that what they imagined for themselves at 16 was mostly a fantasy.

You see, when we are just out of childhood by a few years and about to reach adulthood in a couple of years, we feel as if we see our life very clearly ahead of us. In fact, we can be quite certain of our future life. There is nothing wrong with this kind of healthy outlook for the future. The only things you want to be careful about are the choices that you make that can impact the rest of your life. Some of these choices are related to your educational path, your company of friends and experimentation with drugs and sexuality. These seemingly easy and temporary choices have the potential to impact your long-term picture.

It makes best sense to take your time before jumping in. Some matters are best decided after reaching adulthood, as they require emotional and judgmental maturity that we as humans do not normally possess at age of 16. As a part of your research, you may want to talk to others who may have tried what you are about to embark upon. You can seek advice from a school counselor or a grown-up that you have a trusting relationship with. Since you are addressing a cultural belief issue which may pose conflict with your parents, it is wise to consult an individual that both you and your family have a respectful relationship with. This assures the best possible outcome while preserving healthy relations in the long run among all involved. At some point, you may seek professional guidance to accomplish your well thought out and intended goals.

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