



Tips for Involved Parents from Gwinnett County Public Schools

Be There is a national movement that inspires parents to become more involved in their children's education. Teachable moments are everywhere. Be your child's favorite teacher. Connect in meaningful ways and your simple actions will reap immense rewards at home, play, and school!

Raising a grandchild with special needs

Grandparents caring for grandchildren with disabilities face unique challenges and may require special support and education. The following tips and suggestions may be helpful as you support your grandchild.

■ **Acknowledge your concerns**

Whether your grandchild's special needs were identified at birth or once he or she entered school, you may experience feelings of anger, loss, or grief. Perhaps you had dreams and expectations for your grandchild that now seem out of reach. Maybe dealing with your grandchild's special needs is taking a toll on you—emotionally, physically, or financially. Time, learning about how you can support your grandchild, and a robust support system (including folks who have experienced the same thing) should help. If not, find a counselor or therapist who can help you develop perspective and the coping skills you will need to support your grandchild.

■ **Adjust expectations, if needed**

Know that every child, whatever his or her exceptionality, can make progress on realistic goals. Work with your grandchild's teachers, therapists, and other support staff to understand what is expected and how you can support your grandchild. Provide a positive and loving environment for your grandchild, helping to overcome obstacles and celebrating gains, even incremental ones. Don't "give up" on dreams for your grandchild, but develop new ones that play to his or her strengths.

■ **Educate yourself and take an active role**

Learn as much as you can about your grandchild's disability or condition. Contact your grandchild's teacher for ways to help at home and at school, both academically and behaviorally. Know that your grandchild's behavior typically is a response to something— an action, environment, person, or stimulus. Research resources for children with disabilities and ask other families for suggestions. Attend meetings with your grandchild's teacher and be an advocate for your grandchild. As you are able, become involved in your school community and attend school functions. If your grandchild is medically fragile, make sure you and other caregivers have the needed training to handle medical emergencies.

■ **Develop a support system**

Join support groups for families raising children with special needs. Some organizations cater specifically to grandparents of children with disabilities.

■ **Take care of yourself**

Raising a child with special needs can be stressful. For an older grandparent, that may be especially true. Make sure that you get enough sleep, maintain a healthy diet, and exercise. Do what you can to have some "me time" to pursue hobbies and pamper yourself. Develop social supports. Your extended family, friends and neighbors, and faith community can give you a break, now and then, but also provide you with perspective and a mood-lifter when needed.

■ **Cultivate a positive outlook**

Sometimes the challenges of raising your grandchild may seem to outweigh the joys. However, the effort to "flip" your thinking will pay dividends for you and for your family. Many people pursue a spiritual practice, such as prayer or meditation, which may contribute to emotional health and relieve stress. Whatever works for you, an optimistic attitude will serve you and your grandchild well.



*Together, we will be there for our students—
Gwinnett County Public Schools and YOU!*

Make the ordinary extraordinary!

*Adapted from www.grandparents.com by
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