

**Terrific Parents Terrific Grandparents**  
**Perspectives from Conversations with a Terrific Twelve Year Old**  
By Patricia and Buffy Morgan © 2003

Smart guidance is often right under our noses. Sometimes the child on whom all the fuss, bother, concern and love is centred can provide insightful information. New and renewed awareness came recently when our perceptive twelve year old granddaughter, Buffy, spent a week with us during her Ontario spring break. She left me feeling more guided and on track as a grandparent and wishing I had done better mutual sharing and listening when I was actively parenting. In the following I share some ideas Buffy and I discussed during some wonderfully connected moments.

### **On Grandparents**

What kids want from grandparents is someone whose eyes smile with focused interest giving the message, "You are special to me." Wonderful is a child's call for grandparent attention. Seldom do we hear anything more inviting than, "Grandma, look at me! Grandma, watch this!" Grandparent adoration is expected and how sad when it is not given.

That adoration also includes appropriate treats such as an outing to a movie, amusement area, zoo, sports event or eatery. Cooking or baking a favourite food as a gift gives personal meaning. Sometimes there is a special purchase that hits a child's tender spot. Buffy proudly wears a pretty little heart necklace that her Grandma Dorothy gave her. Grandparents are notorious for "spoiling" children by breaking parental rules around nutrition, nonviolent toys and age appropriate clothing. Grandparents are best to guard against teaching their grandkids that they can have anything they want without ever earning it.

"We like it when you play like a kid," she said. Some adults forget how to play but a child can quickly remind them. The first night Buffy arrived she wanted to play from the dress-up trunk. Fortunately, I still fit into the fuzzy bunny outfit. Then there's cuddling from a welcoming, softened body. Finally, our matured shape is well appreciated. They also like sharing fun conversations with lots of kid listening. Riddles are easy: Why do birds fly south? Answer—because it's too far to walk. Other times a quiet talk about some hurt or worry is welcome. A basic and classic child comfort is, on those inevitable days of being in the family dog house, to believe, "no one loves me . . . but grandpa does."

### **On Parents**

After years of studying psychology and parent education it was a surprise to learn that I still had a space to deepen my understanding from an observant granddaughter. She told me that children want parents to tell them the facts to the questions they ask. "Be honest," she said. If you tell children a stork brings

babies and later they learn the truth, next time they may not ask you an important question, trust your answer or both.

Effective parents create an atmosphere where it is safe to make mistakes. As Buffy put it, “You can buy a new vase but you can’t buy a new kid.” Mistakes provide an excellent opportunity to learn about the consequences of a choice and to establish the habits of making amends, changes or improvements for next time.

One of the most surprising comments from Buffy was about parent limits. “If parents believe in their hearts they need to say ‘no’ they should—even if the kid goes ‘please, please, please’.” In addition to physical safety children need to have clear boundaries for a sense of emotional well being. They hear that someone cares enough to say a carefully chosen ‘no’ to morally and dangerous behaviour.

Parents can motivate a child’s success behaviours by rewarding kids, even if it’s with a high five. They want to know that their parents notice their efforts to cooperate, learn and contribute.

Tension between parents and grandchildren is not uncommon and can be stressful for children. It’s hard to love and be loved by warring parties. It is far better for the two generations to establish some kind of team effort in the best interest of the child. Acceptance of different viewpoints and values along with minimal judgmental comments and advice giving, creates a comforting and supportive extended family atmosphere. As Buffy said, “I need my parents and it’s very important to have grandparents.”

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