

WHAT HAPPENS AT GRANNY'S HOUSE

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

The other day I visited my friend Sue. When I arrived I found that her son and granddaughter were also visiting. It didn't take me long to notice that little 3 year-old Sage had a mind of her own.

It didn't seem to matter what Granny said Sage was not going to obey. When Granny said, "No more chocolate or candy," Sage immediately appeared with a mouthful of sweets. When Granny made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches Sage refused to eat her crusts even though Sue explained that the crusts tasted the same as the rest of the sandwich. With a large pile of crusts left on her plate, Sage announced she was hungry, got down from the table without saying, "Thank you, Granny," or "Please may I get down?" She made a 'B line' for the fridge and freezer, dragging out whatever she could find. I observed this behavior in amazement. I felt sorry for Sue. She was obviously trying to instill good behavior patterns into little Sage, but her input seemed to make no difference to the child at all. Sage's father showed little interest in his daughter's activities the whole time I was there. I think he thought his custodial responsibility ended the moment he brought her into the house. (Unfortunately, I have seen the same parental pattern over and over in churches we have attended.)

I am sure there are many grandparents who feel frustrated that their grandchildren have not been taught good manners and do not obey those in authority. So, what is the best way to handle this situation? Your first responsibility as grandparents or caregivers is to discuss your expectations with the child's parents. When parents and caregivers are on the same page they present a consistent, united front. Where possible, follow the parents' wishes pertaining to training and discipline. However, if your expectations are worlds apart, then the problem must be sorted out quickly. Are the parents being too lax, inconsistent or too strict? Are your expectations unreasonable? Find common ground. You have the right to set boundaries in your own home and, believe it or not, kids do like to know where they stand.

In Sue's case, I would have suggested she talk to her son about the way he was brought up and the expectations they had of him while he lived at home. Then I would tell her that she obviously wanted the best for Sage. Therefore, she needed to treat Sage the same way he was trained. Sue could talk about particular behaviors she would like Sage to change and how she would like to train Sage to meet her expectations. If the son agreed then Sue would need her son and daughter-in-law to back her up. She would need to establish consequences that the parents would agree to and follow through with them.

You do not have to put up with persistent negative behavior in your own home. It is stressful and unnecessary.

Children want to please. They thrive on encouragement and praise, so it is best to concentrate more on the things they do well, than constantly pick on the behaviors that are not up to your expectations.

Grandparents have an awesome opportunity to positively affect the lives of their grandchildren. They have the time, the interest and an obvious bond or connection. This attempt to change Sage's behavior should not turn into a 'them and us' situation where parents or grandparents take sides. It should be a combined effort to help children become respectful, responsible adults who, in turn, pass on the legacy to their children.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.