

A Letter to Grandparents

Dear Grandparents (and other family members),

Congratulations on the birth of your new grandchild! This birth marks the continuation of your family into a new generation. Your support and love can ease your own child's transition into parenthood.

If your children invite you to come and help, recognize it as an honor. Ask them what you may do to help. Do they want you to prepare meals, do laundry, shop and keep the house clean? You will work hard, sleep little, and leave tired and appreciated. But please avoid the mistakes that some new grandparents make – monopolizing the baby, criticizing the parent's decisions and actions, and giving unwanted, out of date, or opinionated advice. Of course, if they ask you for advice, feel free to give it, or to check the books in areas where you are uncertain.

What your grandchild needs most from you is your nurturing support of his or her parents. The parents need you to support and honor their thoughtful decisions about parenting and their style of parenting, even if they are different from yours. Ask to read the same books they are reading on newborn care and feeding. They need you to support them as they learn about and care for their new baby.

They need to hear from you that you think they are wonderful parents, and the very best parents your grandchild could have . They need to hear from you that parenthood is always challenging and tiring and at the same time, one of the most important and rewarding things they will ever do. Let them know you have confidence in them.

If your relationship with them is strained or difficult, think of what you can and cannot do to support this new family. If being with them is too difficult for you or for them, your presence might worsen your relationship and make their adjustment to parenthood more difficult. Instead of visiting them right away, you could send help in the form of a postpartum doula, diaper service, meals, or presence of another family member. Reaching out in this way could go a long way in healing the relationship between you.

They need you to be gentle with your expectations of them and forgiving if they forget to thank you for your presence and your gifts. Memories are made in these first weeks following birth – ones that are never forgotten. Your children will always remember your unconditional love and acceptance.

With best wishes for joyful grandparenting,

Penny Simkin