

Winning With Family Caregivers

This Month's Expert: Carmen Inoa Vazquez, PhD
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My mom watches my children while I'm at work. It's a great arrangement, but we're not always on the same page about things like snacks and TV watching. How can we resolve these issues *and* keep the peace?

A: With more than a third of all parents—and over 42 percent of Hispanic families—depending on relatives for child care, it's important to address problems as they come up. What's most crucial when you and your mom disagree is communication. She may feel that she's more experienced in the child-rearing arena and may have a hard time thinking of you as an adult. It's your job to diplomatically, but firmly, persuade her to respect your viewpoint.

If your mom is letting your kids zone out in front of the tube, try saying, "I know you want what's best for the kids, so together let's cut down on their TV viewing." Then help your mom come up with entertaining alternatives. You could post a list of activities on the fridge and stock crafts and games on a shelf in the family room.

Learn to pick your battles. Some issues just aren't worth fighting over. For example, snacks like an occasional cookie or two won't hurt most kids. But when it comes to spanking and discipline, be firm. Explain that consistent approaches to handling problems work better for everyone.



And keep in mind that the upside of family care is that your kids will be well cared for and loved like crazy.

One more thing to help keep things running smoothly: Talk about payment. Use rates charged by child-care centers in your area as your guide. Even if your mother refuses pay, you'll want to reimburse her for things like groceries and diapers. (See other ways to thank her, below.) After all, your children's time with their grandmother is priceless. —Interview by Kathleen Maloney

Reader Tips on Thanking Helpful Relatives



Make a Meal

My 5-year-old son and I show our appreciation to family members who babysit with a "thanks for giving" meal. We either invite them over or give them a takeout dinner in a big basket that's colorfully wrapped. They pick the menu ahead of time, and we cook it. It's the least we can do to pay them back. —Shannon Mann, technical writer, Silver Spring, MD



Offer a Treat

There are so many ways to say thank you, from a simple card or extra phone call to tickets for a play or concert. My mother enjoys manicures, so I buy her gift certificates for those. And when she picks up the children from school, I give her restaurant gift certificates to help offset the cost of a takeout meal. —Tiffany Ashley, university administrator, Chicago, IL



Lend a Hand

To show appreciation to my mother-in-law, who occasionally watches our two boys, we help her around the house—from painting rooms and changing lightbulbs to carrying recyclables and heavy items to the trash. And the kids color or paint her a picture, which she promptly hangs on her refrigerator. —Sheryl Williams, human resources director, Arvada, CO