

Parenting With Fran

The Holiday Season is approaching quickly, starting with Thanksgiving. It is a time for family and friends to get together for visits and dinner parties. Often, however, parents with young children have ambivalent feelings about spending time with those special people in their lives. Traveling with young children and/or having guests in the home can cause children's routines to be broken and parents to feel more frazzled than usual trying to cope with the normal issues of bedtime, eating and playtime. Older family members or siblings often offer their ideas and opinions about how to manage these childhood dilemmas. When the generations come together, there is definitely the potential for hurt and angry feelings.

During my 8 years of working with families at Parenting Place, I often heard complaints about family members interfering or offering unsolicited suggestions concerning the proper care of young children. Many parents admitted that they dreaded getting together with their families. The most urgent and problematic complaints came from mothers describing the actions of their mother-in-laws. Since I have 2 sons and hopefully will be a grandmother in the near future, I often listened with alarm worrying how my own daughter-in-laws would react to me. After considerable thought about this relationship problem, I arrived at some conclusions and ideas for helping to bring the generations closer together. I shared my views with many moms in my groups and often got positive feedback. Hopefully, you, too, will feel more prepared to deal with your own families.

Being a social worker, I begin with the premise that family members truly care for each other, but sometimes do not present themselves in the most endearing manner. Often your parents and in-laws want to be helpful and appear knowledgeable about raising children. After all they did manage to parent you and/or your spouse/partner, and hopefully you all turned out fairly good. Now they believe that they can speak from a place of wisdom and experience. In other words, no matter what they say or do, their intentions come from a positive place. You certainly do not need to agree with their position, but you can listen to their suggestions. The following mantra can be helpful when encountering unsolicited advice from family members. **“That’s an interesting idea. I will think about it. Thanks for sharing your thoughts.”** Hopefully, your family member will feel validated and respected and you in turn will have the opportunity to think about the advice, instead of reacting, and to decide whether or not it is a good fit for you and your child.

I would love to hear from you about your thoughts and concerns as parents of young children. You can get in touch with me at parentingwithfran@gmail.com
Wishing you and your family a very Happy Thanksgiving.

Fondly, Fran