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GRG Newsletter

Montana Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Project

Getting Ready for School

The summer has gone by fast and the “Back to School” ads are appearing. Kids will be heading back to school soon. This newsletter offers some tips and resources as you prepare your grandchild for the school year. First, we offer some information specific to Montana.



During the 2007 Montana Legislative session two bills were passed that will assist grandparents in the state.

- *Montana Senate Bill 48* allows grandparent medical authority for their grandchildren when their adult children cannot be located. You will need to complete an affidavit.
- *Montana Senate Bill 49* allows grandparents to enroll their grandchildren in school when the adult children cannot be located. You will need to complete an affidavit. Your grandchild’s school will have a copy of the affidavit form. You then will be able to enroll your grandchild and not pay out-of-district tuition.
- More information on these bills can be found at <http://leg.mt.gov/css/Default.asp>. You may also be interested in looking at all legislation regarding Montana relative caregivers at www.grandfamilies.org.

Another website that may be useful to you is the Montana Office of Public Instruction’s Parent page at <http://www.opi.mt.gov/parents/> If you do not have access to the internet call OPI toll free with your questions about your grandchild and school at (888) 231-9393.

Many grandchildren being raised by grandparents qualify for the USDA Free and Reduced Meal program in the school. With this program grandparents complete a confidential income verification form that is available through the school. The grandchildren may then be eligible for free or reduced-cost hot breakfasts and hot lunches.

If you have any questions about your grandchild and school, feel free to call us at (406)994-3395.

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Back to school can be a stressful time for both children and grandparents but the transition will be easier if your grandchild feels confident. Follow these tips for an easier transition from summer fun to school and for children who are more successful and happier in school.

Talk with Your Grandchild

Talking and listening play major roles in children's school success. It's through hearing parents and family members talk and through responding to that talk that young children begin to pick up the language skills they will need if they are to do well. For example, children who don't hear a lot of talk and who aren't encouraged to talk themselves often have problems learning to read, which can lead to other school problems. In addition, children who haven't learned to listen carefully often have trouble following directions and paying attention in class. Find time to talk any place, for example:

- As you walk with your child or ride with her in a car or on a bus, talk with her about what she's doing at school. Ask her to tell you about a school assembly or a field trip. Point out and talk about things that you see as you walk—funny signs, new cars, interesting people.
- As you shop in a store, talk with your child about prices, differences in brands and how to pick out good vegetables and fruit. Give your child directions about where to find certain items, then have him go get them.
- As you fix dinner, ask your child to help you follow the steps in a recipe. Talk with him about what can happen if you miss a step or leave out an ingredient.
- As you read a book with your child, pause occasionally to talk to him about what's happening in the book. Help him to relate the events in the book to events in his life: "Look at that tall building! Didn't we see that when we were in Chicago?" Ask him to tell in his own words what the book was about. Ask him about new words in a book and help him to figure out what they mean.



Encourage Your Grandchild to be Responsible and to Work Independently

Taking responsibility and working independently are important qualities for school success. Here are some suggestions for helping your child to develop these qualities:

- Establish rules. Every home needs reasonable rules that children know and can depend on. Have your child help you to set rules, then make sure that you enforce the rules consistently.
- Make it clear to your child that he has to take responsibility for what he does, both at home and at school. For example, don't automatically defend your child if his teacher tells you that he is often late to class or is disruptive when he is in class. Ask for his side of the story. If a charge is true, let him take the consequences.
- Work with your child to develop a reasonable, consistent schedule of jobs to do around the house. List them on a calendar. Younger children can help set the table or put away their toys and clothes. Older children can help prepare meals and clean up afterwards.
- Show your child how to break a job down into small steps, then to do the job one step at a time. This works for everything—getting dressed, cleaning a room or doing a big homework assignment.
- Make your child responsible for getting ready to go to school each morning—getting up on time, making sure that he has everything he needs for the school day and so forth. If necessary, make a checklist to help him remember what he has to do.
- Monitor what your child does after school, in the evenings and on weekends. If you can't be there when your child gets home, give her the responsibility of checking in with you by phone to discuss her plans.



Help Your Grandchild Learn to Use the Internet Properly and Effectively

The Internet has become an important part of how we learn and of how we interact with

others. For children to succeed today, they must be able to use the Internet. Here are some suggestions for helping your child learn to do so properly and effectively:

- Spend time online with your child. If you don't have a computer at home, ask your librarian if the library has computers that you and your child may use. Learn along with your child. If you're not familiar with computers or with the Internet, ask the librarian if and when someone is available at the library to help you and your child learn together to use them. If your child knows about computers, let her teach you.
- Help your child to locate appropriate Internet Web sites. At the same time, make sure that she understands what you think are appropriate Web sites for her to visit. Point her in the direction of sites that can help her with homework or that relate to her interests. Resources such as GetNetWise (<http://www.getnetwise.org/>), a public service provided by Internet corporations and public interest groups can help you to make good Web site choices and give you more information about Internet use.
- Monitor the amount of time that your child spends online. Internet surfing can be just as time consuming as watching TV. Don't let it take over your child's life. Have her place a clock near the computer and keep track of how much time she is spending online.
- Teach your child rules for using the Internet safely. Let him know that he should never do the following: tell anyone—including his friends—his computer password; use bad language or send cruel, threatening or untrue e-mail messages; give out any personal information, including his name or the names of family members, home address, phone number, age, school name; or arrange to meet a stranger that he has "talked" with in an online "chat room."



Encourage Active Learning

Children need active learning as well as quiet learning such as reading and doing homework. Active learning involves asking and answering questions, solving problems and exploring interests. Active learning also can take place when your child plays sports, spends time with friends, acts in a school play, plays a musical instrument or visits museums and bookstores. To promote active learning, listen to your child's ideas and respond to them. Let him jump in with questions and opinions when you read books together. When you encourage this type of give-and-take at home, your child's participation and interest in school is likely to increase.

Encourage Your Grandchild to Read

Helping your child become a reader is the single most important thing that you can do to help the child to succeed in school—and in life. The importance of reading simply can't be overstated. Reading helps children in all school subjects. More important, it is the key to lifelong learning. Here are some tips on how to help your child become a reader.

- Start early. When your child is still a baby, reading aloud to him should become part of your daily routine. When your child begins to read, ask him to read to you from books or magazines that he enjoys.
- Make sure that your home has lots of reading materials that are appropriate for your child. Keep books, magazines and newspapers in the house. Reading materials don't have to be new or expensive. You often can find good books and magazines for your child at yard or library sales. Ask family members and friends to consider giving your child books and magazine subscriptions as gifts for birthdays or other special occasions.
- Set aside quiet time for family reading. Some families even enjoy reading aloud to each other, with each family member choosing a book, story, poem or article to read to the others.



Communicate with Teachers and Schools

Many teachers say that they don't often receive information from parents about problems at home. Many parents say that they don't know what the school expects from their children—or from them. Sharing information is essential and both teachers and parents are responsible for making it happen. The following questions and answers can help you to get the most out of talking to your child's teacher or with other school staff members.



- **Q: What do I do first?**

Learn everything that you can about your child's school. The more you know, the easier your job as a parent will be. Ask for a school handbook. This will answer many questions that will arise over the year. If your school doesn't have a handbook, ask questions of the principal and teachers. Ask if the school has a Web site and, if so, get the address. School Web sites can provide you with access to all kinds of information—schedules of events, names of people to contact, rules and regulations and so forth. Keep informed throughout the school year. If your schedule permits, attend PTA or PTO meetings. If you are unable to attend, ask that the minutes of the meetings be sent to you. Or, find out if the school makes these minutes available on its Web site.

- **Q: When should I talk with my grandchild's teacher?**

Early and often. Contact your child's teacher or teachers at the beginning of the year or as soon as you can. Get acquainted and show your interest. Tell teachers what they need to know about your child. If she has special needs, make these known from the beginning. If you notice a big change in your child's behavior, school performance or attitude during the school year, contact the teacher immediately. You may also want to find out if your child's teachers use e-mail to communicate with parents. Using e-mail will allow you to send and receive messages at times that are most convenient for you.

- **Q: What if my child has a problem, such as with homework or not understanding what's happening in class?**

Contact the teacher as soon as you suspect that your child has problem with his schoolwork. Schools have a responsibility to keep you informed about your child's performance and behavior and you have a right to be upset if you don't find out until report-card time that your child is having difficulties. On the other hand, you may figure out that a problem exists before the teacher does. By alerting the teacher, you can work together to solve a problem in its early stages. Request a meeting with the teacher to discuss problems. Approach the teacher with a cooperative spirit. Believe that the teacher wants to help you and your child, even if you disagree about something. Don't go to the principal without first giving the teacher a chance to work out the problem with you and your child.

- **Q: How do I get the most out of parent-teacher conferences?**

Be prepared to listen as well as to talk. It helps to write out questions before you leave home. Also jot down what you want to tell the teacher. Be prepared to take notes during the conference and ask for an explanation if you don't understand something. In conferences, the teacher should offer specific details about your child's work and progress. If your child has already received some grades, ask how your child is being evaluated. Talk about your child's talents, skills, hobbies, study habits and any special sensitivities such as concern about weight or speech difficulties. Tell the teacher if you think your child needs special help and about any special family situation or event that might affect your child's ability to learn. Ask about specific ways to help your child at home. Try to have an open mind. At home, think about what the teacher has said and then follow up. If the teacher has told you that your child needs to improve in certain areas, check back in a few weeks to see how things are going.

Encourage Your Grandchild to Use the Library

Libraries are places of learning and discovery for everyone. Helping your child find out about libraries will set him on the road to being an independent learner. Here are some suggestions for how to help:

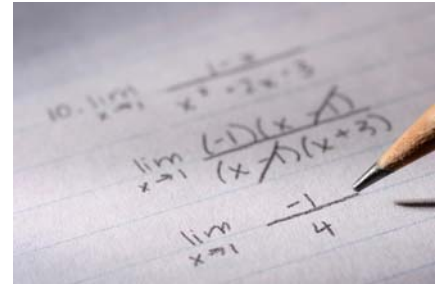
- Introduce your child to the library as early as possible. Even when your child is a toddler, take him along on weekly trips to the library. If you work during the day or have other obligations, remember that many libraries are open in the evening.
- See that your child gets his own library card as soon as possible so that he can check out his own books.
- Ask the librarian to tell your child about special programs that he might participate in, such as summer reading programs and book clubs and about services such as homework help.
- Let your child know that she must follow the library's rules of behavior. Libraries want children to use their materials and services. However, they generally have rules such as the following that your child needs to know and obey: library materials must be handled carefully; materials that are borrowed must be returned on time; and all library users need to be considerate of each other.



Help Your Grandchild with Test-Taking

You can be a great help to your child if you will observe these do's and don'ts about tests and testing:

- Do encourage your child. Praise her for the things that she does well. If your child feels good about herself, she will do her best on a test. Children who are afraid of failing are more likely to become anxious when taking tests and more likely to make mistakes.
- Do meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his progress. Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you and your child to do at home to help prepare for tests and to improve your child's understanding of schoolwork.
- Do make sure that your child attends school regularly. Remember, tests reflect children's overall achievement. The more effort and energy your child puts into learning, the more likely it is that he will do well on tests.
- Do provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure that your child is well rested on school days and especially on the day of a test.
- Don't get upset because of a single test score. Many things can influence how your child does on a test. Remember, one test is simply one test.
- Don't place so much emphasis on your child's test scores that you lose sight of her well being. Too much pressure can affect her test performance.



Monitor Your Grandchild's TV Viewing and Video Game Playing

American children on average spend far more time watching TV or playing video games than they do completing homework or other school-related activities. Here are some suggestions for helping your child to use TV and video games wisely:

- Limit the time that you let your child watch TV. Too much television cuts into important activities in a child's life, such as reading, playing with friends and talking with family members.
- Model good TV viewing habits. Remember that children often imitate their parents' behavior. Children who live in homes in which parents and other family members watch a lot of TV are likely to spend their time in the same way. Children who live in homes in which parents and other family members have "quiet" time away from the TV when they read (either alone to each other), talk to each other, play games or engage in other activities tend to do the same.
- Watch TV with your child when you can. Talk with him about what you see. Answer his questions. Try to point out the things in TV programs that are like your child's everyday life. When you can't watch TV with your child, spot check to see what she's watching. Ask questions after the program ends. See what excites her and what troubles her. Find out what she has learned and remembered.
- Go to the library and find books that explore the themes of the TV shows that your child watches.
- Limit the amount of time your child spends playing video games. As with TV programs, be aware of the games he likes to play and discuss his choices with him.

Monitor Your Grandchild's Homework

Let your child know that you think education is important and so homework has to be done. Here are some ways to help your child with homework:

- Have a special place for your child to study. The homework area doesn't have to be fancy. A desk in the bedroom is nice, but for many children, the kitchen table or a corner of the living room works just fine. The area should have good lighting and it should be fairly quiet.
- Set a regular time for homework. Having a regular time to do homework helps children to finish assignments. You'll need to work with a young child to develop a schedule. You should give your older child the responsibility for making up a schedule independently—although you'll want to make sure that it's a workable one. You may find it helpful to have her write out her schedule and put it in a place where you'll see it often, such as on the refrigerator.
- Remove distractions. Turn off the TV and discourage your child from making and receiving social telephone calls during homework time. If you live in a small or noisy household, try having all family members take part in a quiet activity during homework time.
- Don't expect or demand perfection. When your child asks you to look at what she's done show interest and praise her when she's done something well. If you have criticisms or suggestions, make them in a helpful way.



Information on pages 2-5 courtesy of:

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Communications and Outreach,
Helping Your Child Succeed in School, Washington, DC, 2005

**Check out the Web for more information on sending
your grandchildren back to school...**

Fact sheets for parents of young children and teens—how to manage the stress of going back to school, how to handle bullying, how to handle peer pressure, and much more.

<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets/back-to-school>

Information for both students and parents—financial aid, GPA calculator, school bus safety, school nutrition, and much more.

http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Back_to_School.shtml

Information on school health and safety—top causes of missed school, backpack safety, check-ups and immunizations, and much more.

<http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cfocus/cfschool06/focus.htm>



More help on the Web for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren...

Go to this link for an article on how to help your grandchildren deal with the loss of a parent.

Helping the Grieving Child

By M. Sue Bergin

<http://magazine.byu.edu/?act=view&a=2461>

Attention Montana GRG Support Group Facilitators!

We want to know all about your groups and how we can help you have successful and productive future groups.

- We have lots of materials—poster, brochures, service guides—do you need any?
- Do you have information on your upcoming fall groups that needs to go on the website?
- How successful were your 2008 and spring 2009 groups?
- Do you have any tips you can share with us and other groups?

Please go to

**<http://www.montana.edu/wwwhd/grg/grg/whatsnew.htm>
and fill out the short survey.**

We would love to hear from all the groups in Montana.

Your feed back is how we make the program better and more in tune with the needs of the group participants and facilitators.

Grandparent Support Groups Across Montana

Billings

Bernie Mason
P.O. Box 35021
Billings, MT 59107
(406) 256-2828

Bozeman

MSU Extension Family &
Human Development
316 Herrick Hall
Bozeman, MT 59715
(406) 994-3395
grg@montana.edu

Browning

Carrie Jackson
Eagle Shield Center
P.O. Box 76
Browning, MT 59417
(406) 338-7257

Colstrip

Jennifer Anderson
P.O. Box 65
Forsyth, MT 59327
(406) 346-7320

Glendive

Pete Bruno
Parents Resource Center
200 S. Kendrick
Glendive, MT 59330
(406) 377-7515

Great Falls

Jona McNamee
Cascade County Extension
454-6980
Mariellen Ritts
(406) 453-3554

Helena

Jeanette B. Mattfeldt
562 Broadway
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 442-8207

Kalispell

The Nurturing Center, Inc.
146 3rd Ave. W.
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 257-5793

Lewistown

Denise Seilstad
712 W. Main
Lewistown, MT 59457
(406) 535-3919

Missoula

Lara Mattson Radle
Families First
Parenting Programs
(406) 721-7690, Ext. 202

Poplar and Wolf Point

Ardis Oelkers
MSU Extension
Culbertson, MT 59218
(406) 787-5312

Ravalli County

Brenda Fisher
Family Services
108 Pinckney
Hamilton, MT 59840
(406) 363-1961 ext. 107

Rocky Boy Reservation

Stone Child College
Mary St. Pierre
(406) 395-4875

Townsend

Nancy Marks (406) 226-3710
Jerri Paulk (406) 266-4249

Get Your MontGuides

Remember there are many helpful MSU Extension MontGuides available to you. Topics include parenting, financial planning and retirement. Visit <http://www.montana.edu/wwwhd/montguides.html> for a full list of MontGuides and information on how to order them.

State fact sheets for grandparents and other relatives raising children.
www.grandfactsheets.org

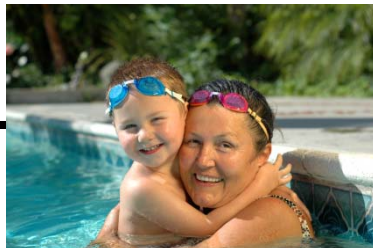
Be sure to check out all the GRG Newsletter back issues at <http://www.montana.edu/wwwhd/grg/grg/newsletters.htm>

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Bozeman, MT
59715

**The Montana
GRG Project**

*Call it a clan, call it a network,
call it a tribe, call it a family.
Whatever you are, who ever you are,
you need one.
~ Jane Howard*



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