

Carolyn Hax: They ‘really cannot stand’ their rambunctious grandchild

By **Carolyn Hax**

Feb. 1, 2021 at 11:59 p.m. EST



Adapted from an online discussion.

Hello, Carolyn: *My husband and I really cannot stand our grandchild. The child is loud, intrusive, screams, runs, climbs on the furniture, demands attention, interrupts, cannot sit still . . . and she's A GIRL!!!! Usually this behavior is associated with ADHD boys. We find even 20-minute video chats exhausting. All we want are two-minute videos and still photos, and to send checks for birthdays and Christmas. The other grandparents seem to be just fine with, and perhaps even adore and encourage, the child's behavior, so we're glad to defer all the holidays to them.*

Can you suggest a tactful way for us to keep our sanity? It's possible she'll improve with time or medication, so we don't want to shut the door completely.

— Can't Stand Our Grandchild

Can't Stand Our Grandchild: Oh, this just hurts my heart.

I appreciate your honesty. But all of those “ADHD boys” — and! girls! — or just energetic kids, or otherwise quirky kids of all kinds, need to be looked upon with love by the world just as badly as calmer kids do.

More so, I'd argue, when they're not as easy to be around. The love of their people is an essential counterweight to generally unwelcoming messages from many parts of society — especially given the anxiety and depression and other co-morbidities that non-neurotypical kids deal with. Strangers tsk-tsk their parents; teachers sigh and send these kids into the hallway; peers drift away from what they don't understand.

It's not all dreary, of course — there are environments where these kids excel. Often their minds are as sharp and crazy-interesting as the bodies they're in. But the dedication of people in the inner circle is still just so important.

So while I sympathize, I beg you to find ways to meet this grandchild where she is. Get the show out of confined, sit-still places and take it on the road to (pandemic-safe) play gyms, parks, hiking trails, water parks, climbing gyms, whatever you can find that allows gross-motor *release*.

Then, delight in this child's joyful movement. Then, delight in a calmer, well-exercised child.

Trust me on this. And do try.

Readers' thoughts:

- I want to cry. That could have been my daughter — and you know what came along with her ADHD? Ridiculously high anxiety. Because what's more terrifying than not being able to control yourself or trust your own brain? She would work SO hard all day at school to sit still, concentrate, behave — and then she would just melt down at home, completely, utterly exhausted from the effort. She knew she was different. She wanted more than anything to prove she was a “good girl.” And she just could not, no matter how hard she tried.

You know what made her behavior and anxiety worse? Judgment and disapproval from people she loved!

When she had a teacher who understood ADHD, she blossomed; when she had a teacher who clearly thought it was all modern bad parenting, she got more anxious, which made it harder for her to concentrate.

Please read about ADHD, so you really understand this is not “bad behavior” — these kids do not have a filter, and have to work a LOT harder than everyone else to develop one.

- Please keep your distance from your grandchild before she figures out you cannot stand her.

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