

QUESTION: I recently became the legal guardian of my 5 year-old granddaughter. Due to her mother's illness, I am the only person who is able to take care of her. My granddaughter is starting Kindergarten after Labor Day. How can I best help her be successful in school? I haven't had this responsibility in 30 years.

ANSWER: Making sure that your granddaughter does well in school could be the biggest challenge you'll face over the years to come. Guiding your granddaughter through school could also be one of the most rewarding parts of raising her. There are several keys to helping children to be successful in school.

Key #1: Meet your granddaughters' basic needs. Your granddaughter must know that she has a genuine place in your home and that she is loved, safe, and secure. Try to determine her abilities and pay attention to expressions of her feelings. Address any emotional or physical issues early.

Key #2: Take an active role in your granddaughters' education. Let your granddaughter know that you are concerned about how she is doing in school. Listen and show interest when she tells you about school. Look at the work she brings home and ask questions about it. Read report cards and messages that come from the school. Provide her with a special place for doing homework. Set aside a certain period of time each day when homework is done. Don't allow TV or video games until homework is done.

Finally, let it be known that you care by taking part in school/classroom events when you can.

Key #3: Build a good relationship with your granddaughters' teacher. Ask the teacher to provide activities you can do at home to help her succeed at school. Your granddaughters' teacher could be your strongest ally during the school year. Introduce yourself to the teacher early in the year. Ask the teacher to give you ideas about how you can support your young student. If you feel that there is a need, it is okay to share only the family matter that you are comfortable sharing and things that may impact your granddaughters' achievement in school. Don't feel that you have to reveal every detail. Some information may be helpful to the teacher while your granddaughter is going through a major adjustment phase. Gather as much information regarding extra help for students, such as; tutoring, after school programs, counseling, etc. Don't hesitate to use any of the services you may need.

Key #4: Set high expectations for your granddaughter. This does not mean that your granddaughter has to get all A's, but set high expectations according to her abilities. Be satisfied when she is performing at the best level that she can. Avoid demanding perfection and be willing to accept some failure. Protect her self-esteem by understanding her abilities. Give whatever support you can to overcome those failures that may occur. If you believe that your granddaughter can do well in school; she will probably think so, too.

Key #5: Read to your granddaughter and broaden her experiences. When you read, it lets her know that reading can be fun, interesting, and important. Encourage her to read, too. Make frequent trips to the library. Remember that readers do better in

school! Take her to museums, art exhibits and science fairs. Sometimes the best learning takes place outside the classroom.

Key #6: If possible, volunteer at school. You'll be glad you did. Being in the classroom can help give you a better understanding of what today's schools are like. It will also show your granddaughter that school is important, and that you are interested in what she is doing. Here's an added bonus: you'll have lots to talk about when your granddaughter comes home at the end of the day.

I wish you and your granddaughter a great school year.

**Questions may be sent to the Samaritan Counseling Center, 302 Cedar St., Niles, MI 49120, faxed to (269) 926-6780 or emailed to [pbambrick@samcounseling.org](mailto:pbambrick@samcounseling.org). Keesha McKee, a therapist at the Center, answered today's question.**

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