

# Disciplining In-Laws ...

Q: We typically see my in-laws three or four times a year. Every time we are with them, they discipline our children in front of us. It really bothers me, and my children are now at the age where it upsets them. I am afraid that eventually I am going to lose my cool with them and worry that my husband will never speak up. Help!

## Answer:

Dealing with in-laws can be very touchy and this is a difficult issue. First and foremost, discuss your feelings with your husband. Ask him if he notices when his parents discipline your children and if it bothers him. Share with him how you see it impacting your children and your concerns around this issue. Coming to an agreement with each other about how you want to handle the issue is the key to preventing it from becoming a bone of contention between you. Letting your husband know how you believe it impacts your children and why you think it is significant enough to address is a good place to start. If he doesn't see the same thing you do, you can



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ask him to pay close attention the next time your in-laws come. We all have blind spots and this could be one for your husband, so you need to help him see what you are seeing. Make sure that you are not overreacting or misinterpreting the impact on your children and consider the possibility that it bothers you a lot more than it bothers your children.

Best-case scenario, you and your husband will be able to come to an agreement on how to address this with his parents. The two of you should decide on the best approach in addressing this with your in-laws if you believe it has indeed become problematic for your children. It may be



easier for your in-laws to hear it from your husband in private. Letting his parents know that he believes that they have good intentions, but that because their visits with your children are so far and few between, you really want their time with the children to be fun and for the children to feel accepted by them. He can gently ask them to leave the discipline to the two of you so that they can spoil them and enjoy the time they have together. Obviously, this is better coming from your husband. If he does not agree with your point of view or is not willing to say anything, then maybe you can suggest that you approach the issue together.

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If your husband is not agreeable to that, then you may be left to address the issue. If this is the case, make sure that you do it with compassion and kindness rather than in a moment when you are angry. Addressing the topic in a non-emotional, caring and matter-of-fact way will likely allow your message to be heard and respected by your in-laws. There is certainly no guarantee that they will discontinue the practice of disciplining your children in front of you, and ultimately you and your husband will have to decide how significant of an issue this is. It may be just as effective to wait until it happens and gently let them know that their job is to spoil your children and it is best to leave the discipline to you ... presenting it in a light-hearted manner will get your message across and may be a more temperate approach.

Addressing issues with grandparents/in-laws can be precarious, but it is important to keep it in perspective. It can feel offensive when parents and in-laws take the liberty to discipline your children in front of you. Weighing the pros

and cons of addressing the issue may help you and your husband to decide the best approach. If you see this as an issue of protecting your children and preserving their relationship with their grandparents it is certainly worthy of addressing. You and your husband may come to the conclusion that because your children see their grandparents so infrequently that it is not critical to address. You and your husband should consider the benefits and potential consequences of addressing or not addressing the issue. This may help the two of you reach an agreeable conclusion. Just remember that the ultimate goal should always be to strengthen relationships rather than harm them and that setting boundaries to protect your children is OK if done with that in mind.

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