

# The Other Grandparents

## Competition or Cooperation

By Miriam Hendeles

**G**oldie is a mom of three children and grandmother of many. She has a nice relationship with her adult children and adorable grandchildren but notices that one of her *mechutanim* buys the kids a lot of fancy toys and that makes her feel insecure. She feels a sense of competition between the two and wonders how to resolve this feeling. Is she doing enough for her kids?

Competition, while good in sports and music, is not healthy in relationships – especially grandmother relationships.

Competition is often associated with teenagers and children and not with adults, especially two sets of grandparents of the same family. But it does exist. When two sets of grandparents live far apart, they may not see what the other is doing, but when the grandchildren comment about things that are happening on the “other side,” a grandparent may feel unsure about how they’re doing things. There can be a tendency to compare or compete. An example of competition that I’ve heard about are when one grandparent usurps time with the grandkids at the expense of the other, causing resentment.

Obviously, there are many factors to take into account, such as the couple’s preferences and the practicality of where everyone lives. It’s not necessarily a matter of who “gets more,” but whatever works for each couple. It’s important to pay attention to the dynamics and refrain from any form of negative vibe or competition.

On the other side of the coin, it’s helpful for people like Goldie in the scenario above to stay in their own lane and not be looking at what the Cohens or Goldbergs are doing. As with anything else in life, being secure in how



we are handling our own lives without comparisons is the way to smooth relationships. And isn’t it better for the grandkids to have different styles of grandparenting, thereby adding rich-

ness to their lives? To me, I see it as win-win. Rather than try to be like the other grandparents, just be ourselves and interact with our children in ways that works for our situation.

I love the close relationship I have

with each of our *mechutanim*, both near and far. When someone in our mutual family does something *nachas*-inducing (cute remark from a toddler all the way up to *mentschlichkeit* from an adult), I’ll

call up my *mechutanim* and relay the story to them. Who said *nachas* reports were only for sharing at PTA? We’re in this together and sharing our *nachas* is what it’s all about. We report to each other after spending a wonderful yom

tov and share photos and fun stories. Buying the kids toys and books is part of my joy as a grandparent, as is spending time with them when I can. At the same time, I have a life outside of grandmothering and stay focused on my own life, rather than be concerned about how much I’m doing or not doing. When it comes to deciding who comes when for yom tov, I don’t keep track or score. Sometimes we have them, and other times they go to the in-laws. Or they split the time between each of us. Generally, I let my kids decide where they’ll stay and for how long. I never want it to be a tug of war.

At the end of the day, *mechutanim* want to see happy and fulfilled children and grandchildren. If there’s a *simcha* or *chas v’shalom* crisis, they chip in to resolve it in some way. I know of a family where the grandparents chipped in for extra speech therapy intervention for their special needs granddaughter in Israel. Another set of grandparents I know split the cost of guitar lessons for their grandchild. If one grandparent has more resources than the other, each can find ways to show their love in ways that work for them.

A wise grandmother can think of ideas to reverse any potential competition or be proactive and set the stage for healthy dynamics. It’s much better for the entire family if the grandparents are friends and allies and treat each other with genuine respect and love. Everyone benefits.




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*JWOW! is a community for midlife Jewish women which can be accessed at [www.jewishwomanofwisdom.org](http://www.jewishwomanofwisdom.org) for conversation, articles, Zoom events, and more.*