

Being a grandparent – an important supportive role.



By an AFA grandparent member

Interacting and Communicating with the parents:

- Keep calm!
- Be a good listener and avoid the temptation to lecture or over advise.
- Empathise rather than sympathise (but not condescendingly).
- Be well informed about the condition, and the support that is available.
- Trust your children to parent in their own way – it will be different to what you did!
- Celebrate what the grandchildren **can** do and don't compare with others.
- Follow the parents lead when you are with them and the grandchildren.
- Choose the right moment to offer advice in a positive way.
- Try to use the same routines, processes and methods of discipline and encouragement as the parents use when looking after grandchildren.
- Have the usual celebrations and activities with all grandchildren equally.
- If you feel something is not right, have a calm discussion with the parent without emotion (not in earshot of the child).
- If you feel the parents are not coping for any reason – offer emotional and practical support and if necessary seek professional help (preferably with them).

Communicating with the child

- Ask what they can see/hear (rather than “can you see/hear the xxx”)
- Learn to describe objects or actions that they may not see.
- Remember that they may not see facial expressions unless they are very close.
- Directions should be specific – next to the table (not over there or pointing)
- Be positive in conversations.
- They will develop really good hearing, as they rely on this to help them know what is happening. Beware of this when having conversations you do not want them to hear – they will pick up on speech that other children will not hear.
- Ask if they need some help (don't just do it for them)
- Give them time to “warm up” when you first arrive, rather than rushing in to hug.
- Give them time and space to map out a room or new space
- Be conscious of how they use their other senses to understand their environment
- Be aware of glare or other distractions/noises that may confuse or worry them
- Remember that being blind or of low vision is “normal” for the child (they don't need pity)
- Have the same expectations and rules for the VI child as your other grandchildren – only modify when necessary without fuss (eg all do chores that they are capable of).
- Allow them to dream – to talk about all the things they want to do – even if it is to drive a car or fly a plane!
- As they get older, encourage more independence. Guide and encourage them to find answers themselves when they meet challenges, allow them to make mistakes and to learn from them in a positive way.
- Be a good advocate for albinism. When with friends or associates, speak in positive terms about albinism and what they can do – about ability rather than disability.