

First-time grandparents may need a few boundaries

By ROBERTA LAVADOUR

Watching a new life enter the world is one of those moments that seem to connect you to the pulse of the universe. I gave birth myself, but when you're at the center of the experience, a bit lost in the chaotic swirl of discomfort, pain, fear, joy and hope, it's different; you've got work to do. Watching the next generation squirm into the world from a comfortable, not-pregnant perspective allows one to really take in that "circle of life" moment.

With the first grandchild, everyone in the family gains a new role – mother, father, grandparent, aunt, uncle – and everything is focused on the little bundle that caused it all. You recognize your father's chin cleft and your own lips, and you just want to hold that baby forever. It can be a bit of a transition to realize that you have to give him back, and that the child you gave birth to and taught to ride a bike is now the boss of you.

My daughter is highly organized, a trait she developed as an act of rebellion against my own somewhat "non-linear" method of managing multiple tasks. When her son arrived, she and her partner more or less followed their birth plan, tacked a firm but kindly worded placard on their front door

prohibiting knocks and phone calls, and alerted everyone that they'd be taking a little time to bond as a new family.

I thought I'd have an easy time deferring to the new parents as



they settled in during the first few days at home, but was caught off guard by how strong the desire was to get my hands on that baby. As I contemplated driving across town to park outside their house (just in case they needed anything), I Googled "first grandchild" and "boundaries" ... and registered 15 million hits. Apparently, it's a thing.

I read articles and blog posts with titles like "Our Baby, Not Yours" and "Set Boundaries Early or

You'll Regret It!" and realized that they were talking about managing people just like me. I resolved to not give in to my craving for baby skin, and with my newly informed sense of self-restraint focused

on getting my house ready for the end of my daughter's maternity leave, when I'd be babysitting one or two days a week. I tried to act casual any time my daughter or her partner asked if I wanted to come by and see the baby for a few minutes, hoping not to get a ticket as a I sped to their house.

There was a surprisingly steep learning curve that occurred with each visit. When you're around a new baby 24/7 you learn all their nuances and quirks. You know which face means they're hungry and which means they're pooping. Aside from sleeping, those are pretty much the only things going on during the first six

weeks. When you visit once a week there are moments of sheer bliss as the baby sleeps in your arms, but more often, especially in those early weeks, it's like trying to tango with an angry dance partner. After long minutes of awkwardly choreographed patting, bouncing, rocking, swaying, and pleading, you discover the true joy of being a grandparent: handing a fussy infant back to his parents.

The baby and I are going to have



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plenty of time to get acquainted as we spend one long day together each week, and I want to be as prepared and deferential as possible. Reading through the articles online, one theme becomes clear: The wishes of the parents always trump the tempting fallback of "That's how I did it with my kids and they survived." My daughter remarked she was becoming surprised that she'd made it through her own childhood unscathed, given the number of questions that I was asking, but expert advice has changed considerably in the past 30 years.

The American Academy of Pediatrics' Healthy Children website (www.healthychildren.org) provides sound information for parents and for grandparents who provide childcare. The site outlines major changes in recommendations for everything from sleeping position to over-the-counter medications to fruit juice – changes that have made kids safer and healthier.

I'm looking forward to implementing all the latest recommendations – including keeping him away from digital screens – and having the opportunity to watch him grow up. I'm sure I'll make a few mistakes and sneak him a forbidden treat once in a while when he's bigger – just don't tell his mom and dad.

That's all part of grandparenting, right?

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