

reading – which, handily, can be done sitting down. “Once you’ve reminded yourself of the basic tales with a book from the library, you can start embellishing them,” says Gribble. “It doesn’t matter how silly you are, the point is to get them giggling.” Grandfathers can also pass on traditional skills that the middle generation doesn’t have time for or has forgotten – like flying kites and making tree houses. Gribble looks after his grandson three days a week and has built him a wooden house in his garden, copying the two-year-old’s crayoned sketch. “To have a distinct, male role model who is different from their parents is wonderful.”

The more closely involved you are at this stage, the more it will bear fruit as the children enter adolescence – which is when grandfathers can make a difference. “In time, you become an adult ally to them,” he says.

“Grandfathers who lend an ear will find they can be supportive without being too emotionally involved.”

As a headteacher of a Peterborough secondary school, he would often invite grandparents to a problem child conferences about a problem child. “Grandparents are very much more calm when engaging with the school. They can often see that the parent is being overly defensive.”

There are occasions, though, when you will have to accept that times have changed. “When I was a child the street was my playground; nowadays that would prompt a visit from social services,” says Gribble. “So, adventures have to be more circumscribed. Grandfathers can take them to the park, even just take them on a bus ride, which children love.”

The big danger is in being too disciplinarian. “You have to accept you are in a second status position. You can’t punish excessively or insist on this value or that value.”

That’s not to say, however, that you can’t have rules in your own house. “I think you can say, when you come to my house this is what we do,” says Gribble. “You don’t have to undermine the parent if that’s not what they do. Children are amazingly adept at operating in different cultures with different rules.”

Education expert Dorothy Lepkowska answers your questions

My child attends a Church of England school, and we have been asked to pay £30 a year to a “maintenance fund”, though this is due to rise to £40 a year from September. This seems like a lot of money, and I don’t understand what this is for. Do I have to pay?

Rachael G, Somerset

Voluntary-aided schools, such as church schools, are not fully funded by the local authority and governing bodies usually contribute 10 per cent of the costs of maintenance of buildings. Many schools choose to pass on some of this cost to parents, in the form of a maintenance fund. These are voluntary and there is no legal obligation for you to pay. Organisations such as the Advisory Centre for Education receive many queries from anxious parents who feel under pressure or morally obliged to contribute. Even if such an agreement is written into your home-school agreement, there is nothing the school can do if you can’t afford to pay.

Write to Dorothy at S Magazine, 10 Lower Thames St, London, EC3R 6EN or email sundaymag@express.co.uk



PARENT COACH



Psychologist Dr Richard Woolfson

One of my children is more troublesome than the other and I’m always telling her off. It makes me feel bad and I’m worried that she’ll be damaged because I appear to favour her brother.

Sue N, Blackburn

Favouritism inevitably has a negative effect on family relationships, no matter what the underlying reasons. Your rejected child feels alone and isolated, and your star child may feel embarrassed and responsible for his sister’s unhappiness. That’s why it’s always best to avoid favouritism. If you can’t stop yourself feeling more negative towards your challenging child, make a huge effort to ensure that this imbalance of feelings doesn’t come through in your parenting. You may find that any tendency towards favouritism passes when you compel yourself to spend more time with her, as she could be misbehaving and acting up just to get your attention.

Dr Woolfson’s latest book is *How To Have a Happy Child*, Hamlyn, £12.99, see Bookshop, page 90.

Clever Ideas

Kaboot

It was at a family dinner that 32-year-old Amir Levin noticed that his two-year-old cousins were sitting on their parents’ knees at the table. The parents explained that they’d grown out of high chairs but were still too small for adult chairs. He started sketching ideas for a device that would raise the height of the chair rather than the child, so they could sit on an adult chair and feel grown-up at the table. The result was Kaboot, a plastic device with four arms that grabs the leg of each chair and boosts the height by either 9.5cms or 11.5cms. The feet are rubberised and it’s springloaded so it won’t come off. It also folds up into a bag. Available in green or charcoal for £26 from www.bibsandstuff.co.uk or call 01293 774924.

