

Aging Lifestyles: Keeping grandkids happy on visits

by Joe_Volz

We had our 8-year-old grandson Wyatt over for the weekend recently. It was a blast. He had fun and we did too.

In advance, though, we worried that he would get lonely for his parents or his friends and want to go home right away. In the end, we didn't have to worry. He was happy to be an only child for a few days, away from his "annoying" little sister and his big brothers.

"I don't like to play with them," he told us, with surprise in his voice.

It was an endearing visit. Wyatt is old enough to amuse himself but not old enough to go to bed on time, or to stay in bed once there.

The first night we asked him to get ready for bed around 9:30 - he said he usually went to bed at 10 p.m. We allowed that stretching of the truth, since we were pretty sure that his bedtime was really 9.

Gotta give the lad a break. What else are grandparents for?

He also had trouble falling asleep, so we did what grandparents always do - Gram crawled under the covers with him until his breathing slowed and his lashes touched his cheek.

Another night, about 5 a.m., he was next to our bed, saying piteously, "I can't sleep." So he climbed into bed with us and then, sure enough, he fell back to sleep. Gram had to crawl over him to get out of bed at 7 the next morning.

We had a problem though. When Wyatt came downstairs, he accused Gram of taking an "awful long time to wake up" - he had to touch her head "21 times" before awakening her.

There's one essential ingredient in which no sleepover would be as successful: Auntie Pam.

Pam Rigaux lives in Frederick, Md., and was eager to spend time with Wyatt. Since she works Saturdays, she had to content herself with a couple of hours on Friday night playing darts. But Pam and her boyfriend, Cameron Gerlach, entertained Wyatt all day on Sunday. Wyatt is a budding guitar player and Cameron builds beautiful wood guitars.

When he came back to us again, Wyatt told us proudly that he had played Cameron's guitar. In reply to our suggestion that Wyatt might grow up and form a band, he said, "I already have a band."

He said that the four-member band hadn't actually gotten together yet because it didn't have a practice room.

Pam and Cameron also took Wyatt to the Monocacy River, near Frederick, to a place where local lore says Indians lived hundreds of years ago. They showed Wyatt how to dig in the earth and recognize a possible artifact from those days - a stone with one smooth side that likely was used as a cutting tool.

So, from our experience with Wyatt and our other 10 grandchildren, we've put together a list of how to keep children happy for a weekend.

Rule 1: Make firm plans. Don't just hope that something fun will come along. It won't.

Rule 2: Plan for a rainy day. It's easier to keep young children occupied when the sun is out and parks and swimming pools beckon. Not so easy with a cold, rainy day in early spring.

Rule 3: Stock up on food the kids like. Visiting grandparents shouldn't let meal times become a battlefield over what to eat; that's his parents' job. Wyatt survived perfectly well on popcorn for breakfast and a chicken nugget Happy Meal at McDonald's two days in a row.

Rule 4: Make the computer and TV your assistants. All grandkids use computers these days for games and they all love shows on Nickelodeon, a TV station for them.

Rule 5: Always arrange for the grandchild's parents to pick him up. We were worn out from tending to an inquisitive child again - even though we've raised five children.

Was it really so exhausting way back then?

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