

"SUPERVISED GRANDPARENT VISITS??"

I am estranged from my adult son, age 30, my only child, who I raised alone since he was age 2, after divorcing his dad. His dad has a personality disorder and has all the problems that go with it. My son married 6 years ago and they live in a distant state.

I only became aware there was a problem when my granddaughter was born and I flew out to visit. At that time I was trying to quit smoking (and did successfully quit a week later), but my son "caught" me smoking outdoors behind their house.

All hell broke loose; they made me change my clothes before I could hold the baby, then washed all my clothes. This prompted them to bring up every little miniscule complaint my DIL ever had against me since they married 4 years earlier. While I understood that new parents might be very protective about a new baby being around even "thirdhand" smoke, all the other things they were complaining about just blindsided me!

My son continuing the conversation wouldn't do any good because "You never listen." He said "You have just one way you think things ought to be, and you just won't accept anything different." They never once said in a loving way, "Mom, we'd love to come visit at your house, but Mary has a smoke allergy that really bothers her," which I could have understood.

I have tried to send a letter of amends to my DIL via e-mail, but despite my sending it twice, she won't open it. I sent it also to my son so that he would know that it was a very nice letter telling her all the true things I admire about her, but she still has not read it.

Do I start over? They ask me to come to take care of the children while they are at work for a week before school starts. Then I was told that they don't think I should be alone with the kids, so one or the other (son or daughter in law) will be "supervising" (their word, no reason). Obviously I love my grandkids and jump at the chance to see them after 2 years, but my son doesn't offer to pay for a thing, I am even expected to pay for household food when I'm there, rent a car for myself - cover all costs 100%. I am not a wealthy person, I am still working full time at my age, because I have to.

ANSWER: I could see why you'd be upset. For young parents to make such a big deal about the smell of smoke on clothes is taking protectiveness toward children to a new extreme. That said, this is the son and DIL you have and therefore all that you have to work with. In this case, I wouldn't process or discuss this any more with them. Instead, I would just allow time to run its course. I could easily see why you'd be both insulted and angered by the idea that you have to be supervised while visiting with the grandchildren (I hear this a lot). But, if it's the only way to spend time with the grandchildren and you can stomach it, it may be worth doing for a while just to prove to them that you're not this ogre that they're making you out to be.