

For retired couple, helping out the kids means setting up their house as a pre-school for their grandson

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Asher and his grandfather, David Goldberg, with their makeshift train. (Photos courtesy of the Goldbergs)

Two-year-old Asher loves trains. So, his grandfather, David Goldberg made him one. Crafted from cardboard, it was big enough for Asher to sit in and move around.

â??Grandparenting is so different these days,â?• said David as he pushed and pulled his grandson around, with Asher making train sounds. â??I donâ??t remember my grandparents getting down on the floor.â?• Asher also likes to give rides to his animal friends and pile up lemons in the train he collects from the yard.

Thatâ??s just one of the many activities the Goldbergs, both 76 and retired, engage in every day as Asherâ??s caregivers while his parents work.

They assumed duties in August when their daughter and son-in-law had to physically go back to work. A nanny, daycare or other options were out of the question because of Covid-19.

When they took on the responsibility, the Goldbergs went all out. In their big three-story house that Asher likes to explore, they set up the family room like a pre-school and their sonâ??s bedroom with a crib for naps.

Asher lives in kind of a Disneyland, and that doesnâ??t mean he watches the Disney channel. No TV for this kid. The playroom hosts different areas for puzzles, for his trains and trucks, and for an easel, blackboard and toddler workbench. Thereâ??s also a basketball hoop, moved onto the driveway in good weather.

Tired but still smiling

They admit there are some less than blissful moments. â??He has his difficult times, wanting to explore his boundaries, like diaper changing and getting into his car seat,â?• said David. â??He usually responds to reasoning, but if not, thatâ??s when we need to be a little malleable and let him watch something on the cell phone â?¦ and itâ??s going to be educational and brief.â?•

Except for a two-hour nap, the couple interacts with him all day. â??Sure, weâ??re tired, but with great big, delighted smiles on our faces,â?• Cheri said.

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The Goldbergs and their two-year-old charge.

Asherâ??s parents broached caregiving with the Goldbergs as well as his Berkeley grandparents, who do occasional morning babysitting. But they had few rules: Follow a consistent eating and napping schedule and take an infant CPR course.

A former child educator, Cheri was confident she could provide Asher a positive pre-school experience. For other advice, she credits fellow members of the â??GaGa Sisterhood,â?• a social network for grandmothers.

Sheâ??d had some experience with two other grandchildren, in St. Paul, Minn. Originally from Milwaukee, Wisc., the Goldbergs moved to San Francisco in 1970 for Davidâ??s medical internship. â??It was very hard connecting mostly long-distance,â?• Cheri said, â??so I used my education skills to make it fun.â?• Sheâ??d come up with a theme for their phone calls, Skype and FaceTime: â??jokes, riddles, dress-up and just plain silliness.â?•

A budding cook?



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Cheri has labeled the doors with big â??Exitâ?• signs, so Asher â?• knows that word means to go out.â?• She plans to label other items in their home â?? chair, table, door â?? to build his vocabulary. She and her husband also read to him a lot, Cheri said, and â??he points to things around the house he finds in his books.

â??We spend our days laughing a lot and observing in wonderment how this little guy grows and develops new skills almost daily. Asher is in awe of everything that is happening around him.â?•



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With all his playthings, Asher most loves watching â??Nammaâ?• cook,â?• said Cheri. â??To see whatâ??s on the stove and in the oven, he stands in front of the refrigerator.â?• He likes beating up eggs for French toast or putting graham cracker dough on a cookie sheet, forming the letters of his name.

He also gets a thrill out of making Challah bread dough, letting it â??restâ?• in the refrigerator overnight, then kneading it the next day into three ropes for braiding. Then he has Challah toast spread with cream cheese and various fruits. For Hannukah, they gave him a toy kitchen, where he spends a lot of time pretending to make his own dishes.



He mixes his own *real* lunch of yogurt and fruit. While he eats, Cheri and David â?? â??Tappaâ?• â?? entertain him with songs and dances, like the tango. Theyâ??re both ballroom dancers. â??We put on a little floor show,â?• Cheri said, and sometimes Asher joins in.

Just a few adjustments



Asher learns about â??bongosâ?? at the San Francisco Zoo.

Asher also gets time in local playgrounds and parks. Once a week, they take him to Golden Gate Park for JAMaROO Kids for a socially distanced music class. â??He needs to see there are other little ones his size,â?• said Cheri.

Caregiving days start at the familyâ??s condo as early as 6:30 waiting for Asher to wake up. â??We take him to our home and love him up,â?• said Cheri. The Goldbergs have him three full days and two to three partial days a week.

Their caregiving schedule prompted the Golbergs to divvy up household chores. David picked up the cleaning and the garden. They both do laundry. â??David even blow-dries and uses the curling iron on my hair â?? something he learned in a half-hour YouTube video,â?• she said. â??He jokes he graduated at the top of his class.â?•

Still, the newspapers pile up. Cheri stopped her Zoom dance lessons. Now they socialize with other couples on Zoom. And theyâ??ve given up two book clubs. â??Yes, weâ??ve had to make some changes in our life,â?• said Cheri, but they have no regrets. â??Weâ??d do anything to help Asher and his family.â?•

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