

Focus on the Little Things: Grandparent—Grandchild Relationships

Many children and teens relish the time they are able to spend with their grandparents. Whether you live far away or across the road, a block of time to physically be together is special. Making memories and taking time to be together are important to grandchildren. But remember, you can make memories without physically being together too!

Grandparents often find themselves needing to come up with “something new” to do and they worry the kids might get bored, especially as they get older! While planning a major trip or event is certainly a special time for everyone, you don’t have to buy plane tickets for Disneyland to make a memory.

It’s important to remind yourself that it’s the simple things you share that are often the most treasured. The point is to find ways to really connect with them. Here’s an example of how this can happen:

“One of my fondest memories of Grandma in the kitchen was the night it stormed and I had trouble sleeping. Grandma offered a cup of hot chocolate to help me fall asleep. When we got to the kitchen the chocolate syrup was gone. She winked and pretended she had the biggest secret to tell me — she knew how to do this without syrup and how would I like to learn her secret? Needless to say I was amazed to see her take cocoa powder and produce the best hot chocolate ever and yes, I’ve used that secret on my own kids and even kids I used to babysit as a teen. Such a simple thing and yet it has become such a special memory.”

Looking for ideas? Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Friends are very important to preteens and teens. Pay attention to the names of each grandchild’s friends. Ask them to tell you why they seem to be such good friends. Tell about your childhood friends

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and show pictures if you can. If they live nearby, invite their friends to dinner or take them out to lunch. Caring about their friends is a sign of attentiveness and real interest in their lives.

- Give your grandchild a picture of their parent as close to their age as possible. Place it in a frame and do this every other year or as it relates to an event. For example, if their dad played baseball at their age, find a picture of him in uniform.
- Call your grandchild and ask directly for him or her — then hang up when you're done, no matter how brief the call! Let him or her know they are important enough to receive their own calls from you.
- Ask about your grandchild's favorite music group, author, sports figure, or hobby — send a tape, book, poster or gift certificate for hobby supplies just because you're interested. Don't wait for a birthday or Christmas. Attach a note saying — I was thinking of you today and want you to know I think the world of you.
- Request a "private show" of your grandchild's activities. Whether they're doing ballet, piano, speech, athletics, crafts, carpentry or computer programming, you can ask for a private performance and talk about their efforts. It's not hard to be impressed with their smiles and looks of deep concentration! Avoid asking if they won — rather, ask what new things they've learned, new friends they've made, or what they're interested in. Your grandchildren need your support and don't need to feel as though they're only valued if they win.
- Be prepared for your pre-teen and teen grandchildren to pull away for a bit when they become busy at school or with jobs and friends. If you've established some special memories they'll never be lost. Soon you'll find they may bring boyfriends and

girlfriends to meet **you** because they value your support and friendship.

- Introduce your grandchild to your favorite games and activities from your childhood. Learning to do "Cats Cradle" or "The String Game" and listening to the songs you danced to while dating is a fun way to connect and tell stories.
- If your place of employment or one of your volunteer organizations has a t-shirt or hat or mug with the group's logo, send or give it to your grandchild with a short story about an accomplishment at work or a successful volunteer effort. Pass your values for commitment, hard work and community service to your grandchildren. There may be a history behind your work such as being a Heart Association volunteer because your grandfather died of a heart attack when you were only 5 and you hope no other grandchild has to miss the opportunity to know their grandfather.
- Show your sense of humor by mailing cartoons you've clipped that relate to your grandchild or to your life. Perhaps telling jokes, funny rhymes or even rapping is your way to convey humor between both of you.
- Congratulations, Good Luck, Hang In There, I'm On Your Side, — these messages and more can be sent for a special occasion or for no reason at all!
- The Bottom Line: When you keep your grandchildren foremost in your mind, they feel valued by you. What a wonderful, useful and meaningful gift. It's true, the little things mean a lot!

Reference

Newman, S. (1996). *Little Things Mean A Lot*. New York: Crown Publishers.

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