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grands *Matter*

Connecting hearts. Uniting generations.

What
KIDS
Say...

So You're
Going to Be a
GRANDPARENT!

When your Grandchild
Has **Special Needs**

The JOY
of Grandparenting

Be Involved
in Your Grandchildren's
Education





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Dear Grandparents and Friends,

For several decades, leaders across all sectors of society have searched for the best strategies to strengthen households and communities. Their efforts to address today's challenges have yielded an array of solutions which include: better jobs, improved schools, preventing crime, involved fathering, getting to know your neighbors, and healthier marriages, to name a few.

Make no mistake, all of these are certainly important contributors to strengthening families. Yet very few of the solutions have included what I now believe is a critical component to help families, communities and schools thrive, and its recognition is long overdue. Of course, I'm referring to proactive, intentional grandparenting.

What if grandparents, in a wise and winsome manner, stepped forward and sought to change the world, one grandchild at a time? What if these grandparents gave of themselves sacrificially and prayerfully, making practical and common-sense investments of time in their grandchildren's lives? What if, through their example and leadership, these grandparents expressed the unconditional grandparenting love and acceptance they're so good at, especially when a family is going through a crisis? What if ...? The list of what grandparents can contribute goes on and on.

Dee and I, along with 70 million other grandparents, I'm sure, believe this is happening right now, and our involvement is only increasing in significance. Why? Because there's nothing more renewing and invigorating than being directly involved in the lives of your grandchildren, when possible. It's a big win for you during this stage of life, and a definite win for your grandchildren too.

In that spirit of enthusiasm and renewal, here's what we are committing to do in this issue of *Grands Matter*: We have some incredible contributors who have written about relevant topics like the beginnings of grandparenting, the growing number of grandparents who have a special-needs grandchild, what grandkids write about their grandparents, how our involvement in our grandchildren's education can make a difference, and much more. Each of these articles is written by seasoned grandparents and leaders in their respective fields. There is much to be gleaned from other grandparents as we seek to excel in our role.

In addition, we have several new and expanded articles—and a growing collection of videos—at grandsmatter.org. We salute our valued supporters for their contributions to our work. Most importantly, we are especially grateful for our growing number of association members. Again, if you haven't been invited to join us in this new opportunity to strengthen families and communities one grandchild at a time, consider this your invitation. We are growing significantly, and we've barely scratched the surface.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken".

Ken and Dee Canfield



Dee and Ken Canfield

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***Grandparents and Grand planners:
How can you have meaningful multi-generational family meetings and gatherings when you work together?***

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National Association for Grandparenting

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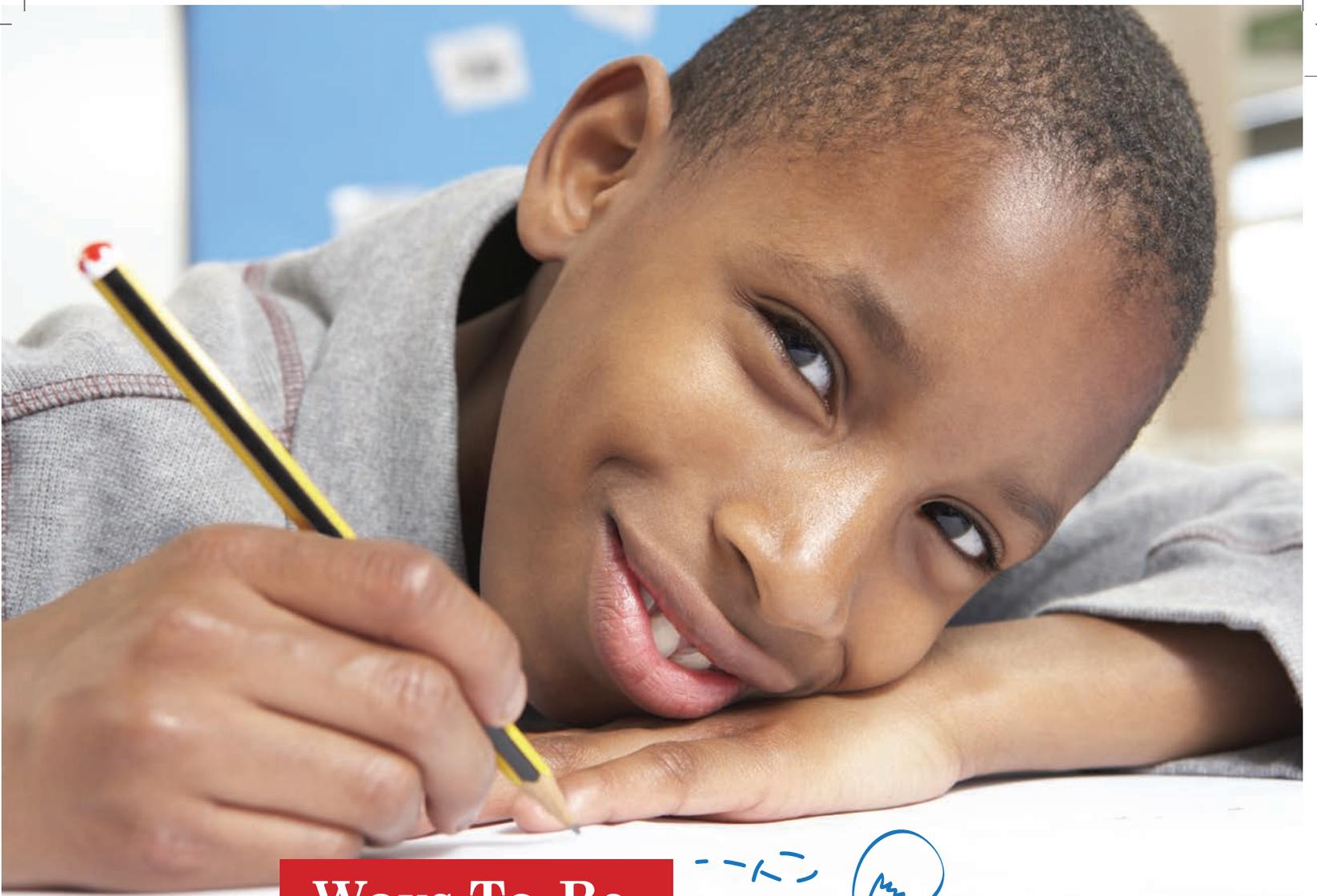
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Ways To Be Involved In Your Grandchildren's Education

Recently I was with a group of friends, and we were talking about our favorite topic—our grandchildren, of course! It always amazes me how we all love our grandchildren, but many of us don't really 'know' them. For a variety of reasons, grandparents sometimes have little knowledge about what is really going on in their grandchildren's lives, and that's especially true when it comes to their education.



Many grandparents would like to be more in tune with their grandkids' schooling, goals, hobbies, friends, accomplishments and struggles.

I am fortunate to have 10 of my 13 grandchildren living in the same metropolitan area. This does make it easier to become involved in their schooling and accomplishments. However, grandparents who do not live close can still keep in touch with their grandkids' education. Here are some ways that all of us can stay involved and informed.

First-hand Experiences

If you are fortunate to be near your grandchildren, I highly recommend volunteering at their school a half day a week or twice a month. Being a volunteer at school helps you develop a strong relationship with the younger generation and lets you feel connected to their fast-chang-

ing society. It also allows you to see the world a new way.

Even if you aren't always in the same classroom as your grandchildren, they love knowing you are in the building! Most school districts have volunteer programs like "Seniors Serving Schools" or the WATCH D.O.G.S. program for dads and grandfathers. You can be a tutor, a library aide, a lunch pal, a teacher's aide who copies worksheets and helps with crafts, or someone who simply listens while a student reads to you. You can also help at school functions and carnivals, or since so many moms work today, the classroom teacher might even need a room *grandmother*.

There are a number of different roles or positions you could fill—and they are all very rewarding. Most schools welcome any volunteers! You'll probably just need to fill out paperwork and be approved in ad-

vance. Check with the school principal or contact the district volunteer coordinator to see what you need to do to be a volunteer.

Also, be sure you attend a variety of your grandchildren's school events like concerts, games, plays, and school fairs. If you cannot attend or you live far away, ask your children to film parts and send them to you. Some schools allow grandparents to receive the school newsletter and calendar of events (usually with parent permission), which will keep you informed.

Your grandkid's school might have a Grandparents Club. Check to see if they do ... and join. If the school commemorates Grandparents' Day, don't miss it. If it doesn't, ask the principal if you can help start one with other grandparents or with the PTO/PTA.



Attending programs and helping in the school not only keeps you connected to your grandchildren, but also allows you to see what your grandchild's world is like.

Most Grandparents' Day activities only last a couple of hours. There is usually a brief orientation session with coffee and muffins, followed by an hour of visiting classrooms, and ending with an all-school assembly where each grade level performs a poem or song for you. A small, inexpensive take-home favor is a treasured gift.

Attending programs and helping in the school not only keeps you connected to your grandchildren, but also allows you to see what your grandchild's world is like.

Communication

You already know how important communication is, and it is vital with

your grandchildren. You can learn a great deal from them, and vice versa. But first it's best to communicate with your adult children, letting them know that you want to stay in touch with your grandchildren, and allowing them to establish boundaries. You don't want to overstep your role or harm the relationship with your children.

Once you're clear on expectations and boundaries, there are many ways to keep in touch with your family and grandkids using technology and social media: Facebook, Skype, Instagram, Snapchat, texting, and so on. Find out



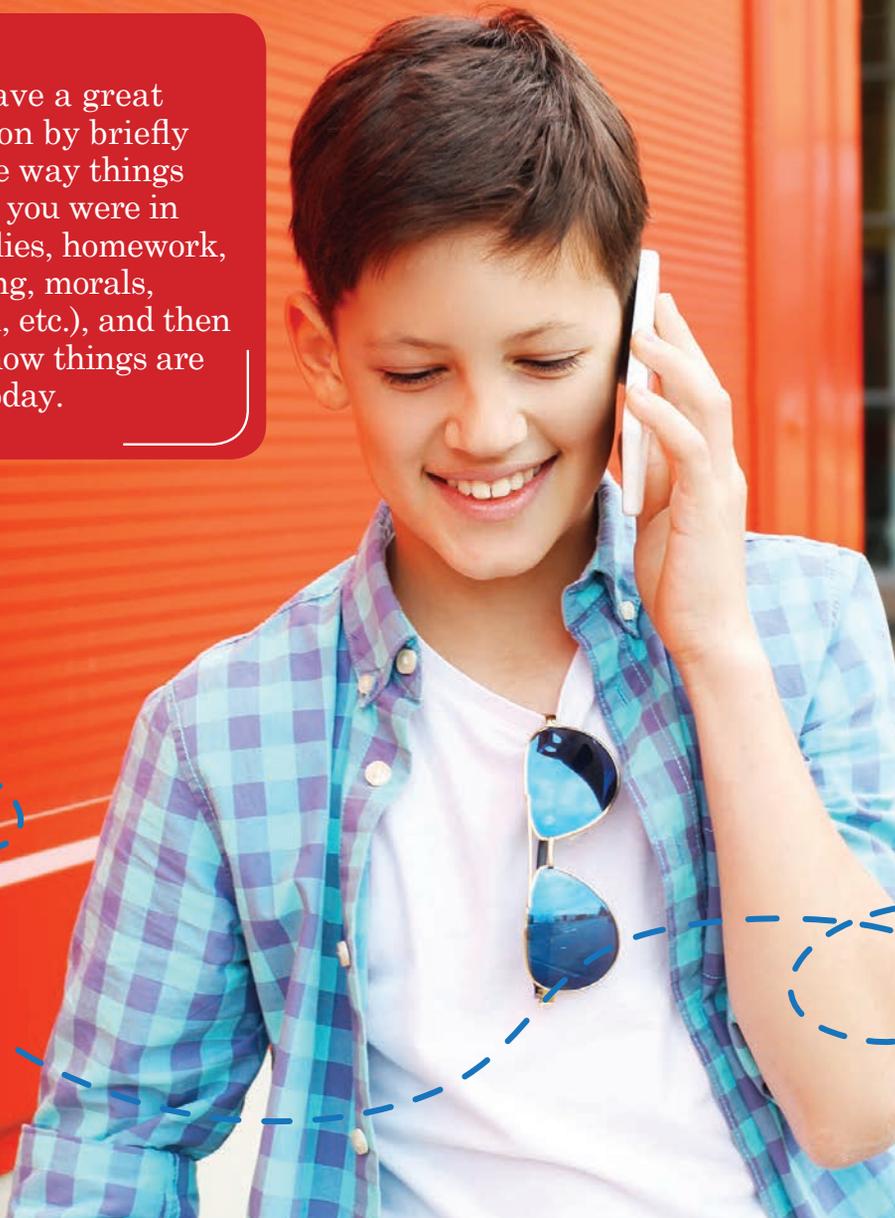
which apps and tools they are using and sign up, then learn them and utilize them.

Of course, the best way to communicate is still face-to-face or by phone. Set up a time, maybe weekly, to call and talk. Or, if you're able, schedule an ice cream outing with a grandchild several times a month. Find out what is going on in their lives—at school and with other activities. If you weren't able to attend a recent school event, concert or game, be sure to ask them about it. Tell them how important learning and school are. Ask questions and share your stories and experiences. What are their struggles and joys? What books are they and their peers

reading? Ask them what they are learning and offer your help and support. Be creative. Instead of asking, "How was school today?" and getting the same one-word answer ("Fine.") every time, be ready with some better questions. You can look up a great list of them online at *The Huffington Post*. Just search for "25 Ways to Ask Your Kids 'So How Was School Today?'" Without Asking Them 'So How Was School Today?'" There are ways to equip yourself with fun questions that your grandkids will not be able to answer with one word.

Although I recommend asking lots of questions, perhaps the most important part of this communication is *listening*. Let *them* do the talking! Encourage them to tell you things. Sometimes grandchild-

You can have a great conversation by briefly sharing the way things were when you were in school (bullies, homework, clubs, dating, morals, curriculum, etc.), and then ask them how things are different today.





dren will tell grandparents things they don't talk about with their parents. You can have a great conversation by briefly sharing the way things were when you were in school (bullies, homework, clubs, dating, morals, curriculum, etc.), and then ask them how things are different today. Be careful not to be judgmental or smothering. Say positive things to them and say positive things about their parents!

The key is to show interest in them and keep the lines of communication open.

Other Ideas

There are other ways you can encourage your grandchildren's education, whether or not you live nearby. One is to offer rewards for good grades. Some grandparents do this and some do not, and this too should be discussed with the kids' parents.

The bigger point is to encourage, encourage, encourage them in their academics. Remember that all kids have strengths and weaknesses, and no matter what grades they receive (if they tell you their grades), be sure to let them know you're proud of their hard work and ask how they became so good in certain subjects.

Finally, another way to support their education, with their parents' approval, is to set aside financial help for their future education—technical school, junior college or college. There are many ways to do this on a monthly or yearly basis. Or you can provide more immediate help during a time when their parents may be stretched financially. Maybe you can provide a laptop or tablet, a special calculator or other school supplies, a uniform, sports equipment, music lessons,

club fees, and so on. Many times these smaller gifts are a big help.

It is true that grandchildren can keep you young! So the more you are involved in their lives—especially in their education—the younger you will feel ... right!? Make that step today to connect with your grandchildren on a deeper level. 



Tom Eddy was a school administrator for 27 years and is currently a school counselor. He and his wife Marty live in

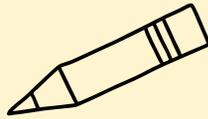
Overland Park, Kansas, and are proud parents of four married children and grandparents of 13 grandchildren (10 in Overland Park and three in Eugene, Oregon).

What Kids Say About Grandparents...

What do your grandchildren think about you? What memories with you stick out in their minds? They might not ever communicate that to you (or they might), but here are some written comments from other grandchildren about their grandparents to encourage you. Know that your grandchildren would have very similar things to say about you.

Grandma helps me do my homework. When I don't understand things and if she doesn't know, she tries to figure it out with me.

- Aliyah, 7



I hope to make many more memories with my grandma that I will cherish for the rest of my life. I hope that she will continue to teach me things so that I can carry on to teach my children/grandchildren someday as she has done with and for me.

- Hayley, 12

What I want to do in the future is for my grandpa to walk me down my wedding aisle.

- Elena, 9



I have a fantastic grandpa. He took my brother and me to stay with him. My grandpa is so thoughtful and caring because he chose to do this.

- Tyler, 8

My grandma means everything in the world to me. She is one of a kind. She's always there when I need her.

- Anthony, 7

My grandma has encouraged me to reach higher goals than even I believed I could reach. I have been successful in school, sports and life because of her support.

- John, 9

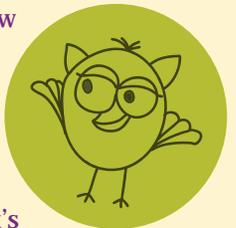


She supports me with whatever happens and whatever mistakes I have made. My grandma is someone I can always rely on.

- Jackson, 13

My neighborhood was destroyed by a tornado. Trees were knocked down everywhere and many homes were destroyed or had no electricity. My grandfather drove five hours to my house and came to the rescue when we were in so much need of help. We cleared the trees with his chainsaws and even helped other people who needed lots of assistance. When we were done he told me, "Andre, I'm so proud of you. You're finally becoming a man! Putting others before yourself shows compassion, empathy and a strong will." I hugged him and told him how thankful I was to have a grandfather like him. Best moment in my life, and that's why he's my role model.

- Andre, 17



Papa is the most honorable man I have ever met. True to his family and faith, he is always a pleasure to be around. To me, Papa means everything.

- Garrett, 14



My grandpa is a good man. He always helps people when they need help. He always teaches me how to fix things when they are broken. He taught me how to fish and hunt deer to provide food for our family. My grandpa says to always do my best, that it's okay to make mistakes, and to be brave no matter what happens, and that it's okay to cry.



- Austin, 7

One day Grandpa fell asleep. My sister and I painted his toenails pink!

- Camille, 10



Grandpas are just as good as a dad!
Why is this, you may ask?
Well, because my mother already broke him in!
This isn't his first time.

- Mady, 13

She is the “wind in my sails,” or in other words, she is very uplifting and challenges me to strive in life. Even brief conversations with her can brighten my entire day and help me to better myself. My grandma has more than just maturity and positivity; she has the strongest faith of anybody I have ever met.

- Gabrielle, 15

My grandma has come to all of my band and music concerts. She watches me show my animals at the 4-H fair and is always proud of my accomplishments.

He taught me that men should contribute equally in a household. He helps my Grandma with all kinds of things. He does things like mopping the floor, doing the laundry and cooking meals. (He makes the best roast EVER!)

- Parker, 8



She has had to raise children two separate times in her life. Most days I feel guilty for that. I feel like I took all of her life and used it all up. On other days, I feel grateful. She is the strongest person I have ever met in my entire life. She is my role model. I can absolutely credit her for the values I hold today.

- Briana, 16

One time, Granddad took me to a father-daughter dance and taught me the twist!

- Elizabeth, 10



What Kids Say About Grandparents... (cont'd.)

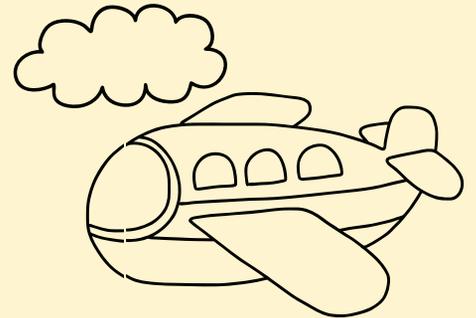
My grandma battled cancer for a very long time. When she was very sick and we went to visit her, she still made an effort to try to tell us she loved us and give us kisses, even when she couldn't even open her eyes. It was very inspiring to see her push through the pain and stay happy when we came. The doctors said she wouldn't make it through that December, but she fought and fought all the way to April. That taught me to push through the hard times in life and to never give up.

- Ellie, 13



He is strong and kind and always tells me how much he loves me. He never forgets.

- Talia, 13



Grandpa was diagnosed with polio at age two, but is still close to God regardless of his trials. His polio left him with a bad leg, so growing up he could never play sports. When I am reminded of this and see that it never beat him, I am inspired to never give up in life. Grandpa has taught me lessons that I will always carry with me. He showed me how to be strong in times of great trial, how to rejoice in times of great happiness, and how to trust myself and God in every aspect of life. I will forever cherish the moments I have had with my beloved Grandpa.

- Gentry, 14

I think it would be great if my grandpa would retire so that we could travel to all kinds of exotic places over the world. That would be totally cool.

- Kyle, 8

She always says, "Practice! Practice! Practice!"... although I don't know why.

- Ricardo, 11

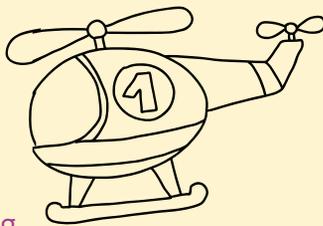


I have great memories of taking naps with him when I was little and I would hug his belly and feel his heart beat. I loved the feeling of his hands over mine when he washed my hands before supper. I loved it when he gave me "Whisker Jobs," and it would tickle my face and make me laugh.

- Daphne, 13

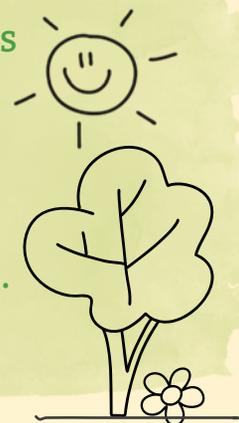
My grandma made sure she was at all my special events. She would take the train, fly, drive, come here any way she could if we had something going on. She has given my family and me so much support.

- Mia, 14



I like to take walks with him in the woods and talk to him. He knows a lot about things.

- Wyatt, 6



My grandpa has been in my life since the first day I was born. He loves to brush my hair and hold my hand in church. He taught me how to ride my bike and how to fish.

- Jasmine, 14

Grandma has family dinners at least once a week. It is not just about eating together. It is about connecting with the ones you love the most. Because of this, my cousins are like brothers to me and my aunts are like second mothers.

- Faith, 9



My grandpa is at all my sporting events because he is retired and has lots of time for me. He even stays to watch me cheer, and he stands and cheers along.

- Hailey, 14

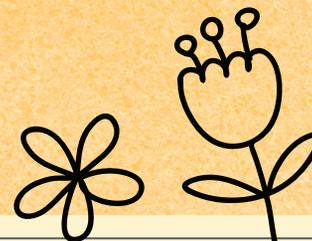


Nobody ever once told her that she had to adopt my brother, sister and me. Nowhere did she ever sign the contract saying she would push me forward with all the encouragement and love her tired heart could muster up. She didn't refuse to give up on me no matter how many times I broke her trust and faith in me. She chose to love me unconditionally.

- Kayla, 17

Nana is my shining light! She is my mentor, security, and giver of affection. She is the one who guides me down the right path in life.

- Daisy, 14





Celebrate the *Joy* of Grandparenting

by Carey & Melanie Casey

Being a grandparent is just that—*grand*. If you're a grandparent yourself, you probably know exactly what we mean. We believe ***this is a role to be celebrated every chance we get.***

We vividly remember what happened just a few days after our first grandchild was born. Our older son and his wife were visiting us with their new baby girl. It was our first expo-

sure to the “happy chaos” that comes when such a small little creature was added to the family mix. The baby’s schedule pretty much ruled our entire household.

One morning we were all getting ready to head out for the day, and I (Carey) was getting on everyone’s case, especially our teenage son: “*Why aren’t you ready?*” “*We have to leave!*” “*I can’t be late!*” Then, just when the

two of us were all ready to walk out the door, I couldn’t find my bride. “Where’s Melanie?!”

Someone told me, “She’s ... *holding the baby.*”

“Holding the baby? You mean ... the baby’s awake?” Suddenly my priorities changed. Surely we could spare a few minutes! And in a flash I was right there at Melanie’s side, making googly eyes and talking to my granddaughter.

She opened her eyes, looked at me, and gave a big smile. Maybe it was gas, but no, we're going with another explanation: There's a special bond—a magical connection—between a grandparent and grandchild. Melanie was savoring that moment, and I wanted to as well.

To make it plain, creating and nurturing that bond is a unique joy. You probably know this too.

Several years later, our daughter was visiting from out of state with her husband and her baby boy, our grandson John John. It was Sunday morning, and I (Melanie) was busy trying to help everyone get ready for church. Carey was up early and was already dressed. He was looking good in his Sunday best—the tie was working, the colors were coordinated, the pants and shoes were just right.

John John was dressed too, but he hadn't eaten yet, so we asked Carey to feed him breakfast. "No problem," Carey said. "We'll have fun." And they did. We put John John in his high chair, strapped his bib on, and turned Carey loose with the applesauce and that baby-sized spoon. John John just sat there grinning at his granddad.

Before I left the room to finish getting ready, I gave my husband one piece of advice: "Sweetheart, maybe you should take off your suit coat while you're feeding him."

He said, "Oh no, Babe. We're okay. He's got it down—look!" He demonstrated how good he was at spooning the applesauce into our grandson's mouth. But only a minute later, John

John gave us another big grin with applesauce in his mouth and then blew a big raspberry and sprayed applesauce all over Carey's face as well as his suit and tie. (I resisted telling him, "I told you so.")

I imagine years ago, as a young father, Carey would have been quite frustrated in a situation like that. But on that day, he didn't let the mess spoil the moment. He leaned in real close to John John and told him, "You're Carey Casey's grandson. You can spit all over me."

That's our attitude. Honestly, sometimes grandkids aren't convenient or easy. But we try to roll with

it and enjoy the good times and the messes.

Here's one more example: We have nine grandkids now, and occasionally we get a chance to keep track of all of them at the same time, with none of their parents around. If I (Carey) am being honest, it's really more work for Melanie than for me, but we both love it. She says it's like "Camp Casey"—moving the grandkids around from activity to activity, cafeteria to recreation to quiet time, and then starting all over again.

We have a unique role to play. We can impart values. We see the big picture. We offer an older and wiser perspective on the world. And like Carey experienced, we're more likely to put other things on hold so we can soak up all the joy of investing in our loved ones.

There was one day I came home from work to this wonderful chaos. First, I walked into the kitchen, and two grandkids were in there eating. They looked up at me with those big eyes, and I gave each one of them a hug and a kiss—while trying not to get messy myself. In the living room, two more were sitting together in my recliner, watching a kids' TV show. So I gave them high fives and they took their eyes off the program long enough to give me a smile. I thought, *Alright, I'll go put on my gym shorts and be camp coach.* But Melanie stopped me. "You can't go back there. We have one sleeping on the bed."

In case you're keeping score: the man of the house comes home, but he can't sit in the kitchen because there's a booster seat fastened to his chair; his recliner is filled with two other little ones; and the bedroom is off limits with another little napper. But it's all good!

These are opportunities we don't get every day, and just like with our own children, they'll grow up and change faster than we realize. We're trying to make the best of every opportunity we have with them, so we don't mind so much when all the grandkids come





for Christmas and wreck the house, with Tupperware scattered all over the kitchen. After they go home, we know we'll have time to rest up for the next time.

There is wonderful fascination in connecting with your own flesh-and-blood descendants. They're motivating and energizing! They bring out a side of us that we had almost forgotten. Their pictures are all over our phones and computers, and we brag on them every chance we get. We can already tell that they're going to accomplish some great and unique things for this world.

If you're a grandparent, you know exactly what we mean. That time with

grandkids is special and rewarding. And what's even better is that our job isn't just about making googly eyes or keeping them safe when they're in our house. **We have a unique role to play.** We can impart values. We see the big picture. We offer an older and wiser perspective on the world. And like Carey experienced, we're more likely to put other things on hold so we can soak up all the joy of investing in our loved ones.

We hope some of these examples have brought to mind some similar experiences you have had with your grandkids. Savor them! They're huge blessing in our lives; they are among God's greatest gifts. (And when you

get a chance, keep the grandkids for a weekend and give their parents a well-deserved break.) 📍



Carey Casey is Ambassador for Fathers at the National Center for Fathering (NCF) and author of the book *Championship Fathering* (2009). Melanie is a 2nd grade teacher at Summit Christian Academy. Carey and Melanie are parents of four children and have nine grandchildren. You can find out more about NCF and WATCH D.O.G.S., the one-of-a-kind, school-based father and grandfather involvement program, at fathers.com.



Could Change Your Life

(And Your Grandkids' Lives)

by Cavin Harper

Grandparents have an important role to play when it comes to impacting their grandchildren for Christ. Do you believe that? Do you take that biblical role seriously? I certainly do, and I get to see it at work at our GrandCamp events.

At the Christian Grandparenting Network (CGN), GrandCamp is our five-day, four-night program where grandparents bring their grandchildren to a destination facility and spend focused time investing in spiritual and rela-

tional growth. Grandparents simply show up and join in the experience with their grandchildren; our staff does all the work.

Numerous grandparents have told us that a GrandCamp experience changed their lives and greatly improved their relationships with their grandchildren, and I really believe in these events. But I'm not here to simply advertise this program. For various reasons, not everyone can participate in a planned program like this.

That describes Jim and Gwen Colfer, who had this to say:

Several years ago, we learned something extremely valuable to our philosophy of grandparenting, and it is this: the research indicates quite clearly that grandchildren often look to their grandparents for moral and spiritual guidance more than anyone else. We immediately understood the important role we could play in our grandchildren's lives, and that GrandCamp could help us to fulfill that role well.

Health issues now keep us from participating in the GrandCamp program...

But that hasn't stopped us from carrying on this extraordinary, faith-focused tradition with our grandkids. Based upon the wealth of knowledge we had learned at GrandCamp, we determined to do our own version. We have enjoyed some very special times with our grandchil-

dren and carried on the family tradition which they all begged us to keep doing!

Grandparents, you too can do your own version of a GrandCamp. You can do it during a week when the grandkids are with you, or over a series of weekends throughout the year. All you need are a few basic principles.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The GrandCamp philosophy is simple: *Godly grandparents equipped with God's Word combined with memorable adventure experiences will produce life-changing outcomes.* I believe sharing the story of God's redemption and grace in such a context—removed from the typical distractions of life—will lead to a legacy that matters for another generation.

The principles behind a successful GrandCamp are not complicated, but it does require some work to do it right. If you grasp these few basic things, you will be able to build your own memorable GrandCamp.

1 Have a clear understanding of your objectives.

Remember that GrandCamp is not an end in itself. It is only a *vehicle* through which God can work to build powerful, life-transforming relationships with your grandchildren. You are serving as conduits of God's grace and truth for these young lives. Design your event well, but don't make it the main focus. Your grandkids are your main focus. I believe you need to have a good balance of spiritual and relational objectives.

Some examples of spiritual objectives might include:

- Your grandchildren seeing Jesus through you in such a way that they will desire to know Him in a personal relationship as well.
- Learning how to make prayer the first course of action in daily decisions, and listening for God's voice in the midst of so many other voices.
- Learning the value of Christian relationships that support and encourage us in our faith journey.
- Learning the importance of confessing sins and accepting the forgiveness of God through Christ's atonement.

And here are some ideas for relational objectives:

Trust: Grandma and Grandpa are safe and approachable.

Confidence: They know you care about the challenges the younger generations face in today's world.

Deepened bonds: Grandchildren treasure their relationship with their grandparents because they know how much their grandparents truly love them and enjoy being with them.

Security and stability: Grandchildren know you will be there for them no matter what situation may occur.

Integrity: You model transparency and godliness in such a way that your grandchildren will want to imitate those qualities.



2 Plan, plan, plan!

Don't try to do this by the seat of your pants. If this is a worthwhile investment, then it is worth the time and effort to plan it well.

3 Decide who will be involved in your GrandCamp.

If you have more than one grandchild, will they all be involved, or would it be better to do more than one event? If you have more than six grandchildren and they can easily be separated into an older and younger group, you could do two different "camps," one for each group. Or, if you can handle it, involve all the cousins together and use the older ones as helpers or mentors for the younger. It's your call.

4 Determine the best location for your camp.

It all depends on what you want to do and what your financial capacity is. You can do a great GrandCamp in your own home, but if that isn't feasible because of size or other limitations, there are plenty of other possibilities. Check facilities in your area or at a place you might like to explore. You might rent a condo, beach house or cabin for a few days, or go to a conference center with family lodges and all kinds of amenities available. Or, if you enjoy outdoor activities (or perhaps if funds are limited), check out area campgrounds and pitch some tents. If you have an RV, use it as base camp and travel around to various locations for special activities during your GrandCamp.

5 Decide which activities to include in your GrandCamp.

The sky is the limit if you are willing to apply a little of your own creativity. There are also a number of great activity idea books available online. As you plan your activities with your grandkids, here are a few things to consider:

- Are there limitations you should take into account, such as age appropriateness, physical handicaps, and mental development? (This goes for grandkids and grandparents alike.)
- Are you certain that the parents won't disapprove of anything you have planned, like particular movies, games, or other activities?
- How can the activities help create teachable moments with your grandkids? Not every activ-

6 Think about the optimum time for doing your GrandCamp.

Normally, summer works best because of school schedules, but if your grandkids are home-schooled, almost any time of year will work. Perhaps a winter camp would be fun, a getaway during spring break, or a grand time at your house when the kids' parents are away as a couple. Discuss the calendar options with your adult children and get it scheduled right away so you can all start making plans.

7 Have a budget. Count the cost so there are no surprises!

I hope these ideas are helpful to get you started. We are assembling a more detailed *DIY GrandCamp Guide* that will give you more tips to consider, such as planning a schedule of activities and building toward a celebration on the final day. The Guide will help you build the most successful grand faith adventure possible with your grandchildren. It will be available in November, 2016, so watch for an announcement on our website, christiangrandparenting.net.

May God mightily bless you and make His face to shine upon you in the task He has given you to bless the next generation, so they might know, love and serve Christ! GrandCamp can be a powerful tool to help you.



ity has to have a lesson involved, but if there's a brief spiritual truth you can point out while you're doing something fun, then why not use it that way?

- Make a list of materials, equipment, and other items required to do the activity, and make sure you have the means to obtain them and use them safely.



Cavin Harper is Founder and Executive Director of Christian Grandparenting Network (christiangrandparenting.net). He is author of *Courageous Grandparenting: Unshakable Faith in a Broken*

World as well as several articles and blogs. Cavin has served in various ministry positions and has operated a retreat center with his wife Diane. They have been married for 44 years, have two children and nine grandchildren, and live in Colorado Springs.

Faith-Filled GRANDPARENTING AT ITS Best

by Ken Canfield, PhD

I recently had dinner with a vibrant couple in their sixties. Our conversation focused on travel, and I was fascinated as they enthusiastically described a dozen cruises, as well as outback adventures and various trips to other parts of the world, all since they had retired. Later in the conversation I asked if they had any grandchildren, and the woman

quickly replied, "Yes, we have two young ones and they live a couple of hours from us." I then asked, "How often do you see them?" For a moment the excitement on her face was replaced with a sullen look. "Not enough. We just don't see our grandchildren enough."

To me, this is a somewhat disturbing trend that I've noticed among many grandparents. Although most of us would agree that, yes, grandparenting is a special and important role for us, our actions don't always back up our stated priorities. We live in a culture that is busy, noisy, and geographically strung out, and family situations continue to grow in complexity due to divorce and other disruptions. It's easy to see how the responsibility of grandparenting could end up on the bottom of our pile. I hear regularly from well-meaning grandparents who say, "Well, we'd like to get more time with our grandkids, but it just isn't happening."

This leads me to an important question for grandparents: ***Do we have a responsibility to devote time and energy to interacting with our grandchildren, as well as share our faith and model healthy, God-honoring behavior for them?*** I'm confident you agree that, yes, you do.

As a grandfather myself, I emphatically believe that this is much more than a responsibility; it's really a privilege and a gift. It's so important a gift that we need to open it and be in awe of its majesty. We need to savor every opportunity we have to invest spiritually in our grandchildren, because grandparenting will change our lives. It's a gift we want to showcase as long as we have life.

Friends, if we don't become more intentional, more proactive, more engaged grandparents—truly *activating* our role as grandmothers and grandfathers—we will be missing a lot of the joy and satisfaction of leaving a legacy that impacts future generations, depriving our grandchildren of the very best benefits we bring and, I believe, falling out of sync with God's plan.

A Bigger Vision for Grands

Faith-filled grandparents would do well to recognize the multi-generational vision God has for families. Sadly, in America we have diminished the role of grandparents. The supremacy of the nuclear family, geographic dislocation, and a culture naïve to the power of the extended family system are

We now can enter through a new doorway, characterized by humility and grace, where we can realize our desires to be better grandparents than we were as parents.

just a few of the contributors. But a big underlying problem is a general self-centered approach to life which says, "Hey, I raised my kids; I've done my work and now I'm going to retire in peace and enjoy life." All at the expense of our grandchildren, who become a low priority in our retirement plans.

Most of the reasons for delaying or even pushing off our grandparenting responsibilities to others are woefully short-sighted. We can't go through life believing that our parenting responsibilities extend only to our immediate family. When our children have children, our role is much different, for sure. But the love, encouragement and spiritual nurturing of our grandchildren is as important as the care we provided for our children. There's a much bigger picture for grandparenting that we need to grasp.

For most of us, age and maturity bring the realization that there are many things we could have done better when we were raising our children, and relating to our grandchildren becomes even more important because it opens up new facets of our parenting. We now can enter through a new doorway, characterized by humility and grace, where we can realize our desires to be better



grandparents than we were as parents. Perhaps grandparenting prepares us for glory, where humility, grace, love and God's presence reign.

God's Word for Grands

Here are a few examples out of many in Scripture where the blessings and promises of having children contain multi-generational responsibilities. Psalm 127:3 tells us that children are gift from God, and Psalm 103:17 captures the



multi-generational aspect: “But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children.”

One of my favorites is found in Proverbs: “Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children” (17:6). Clearly, God smiles on the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

Abraham pleaded with God to give him an heir (Gen. 15:2), and God graciously responded with a multi-generational proclamation: “For I have chosen Abraham that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, by doing what is right and just” (Gen. 18:19).

The vision of children as a multi-generational blessing also carries an expectation. Moses challenged those who were miraculously delivered from slavery in Egypt with this exhortation which extends to the next generation: “Do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them” (Deut. 4:9). Moses knew that if the power of God was going to extend to future generations, it would require the entire clan, especially grandparents, to fulfill His plan.

A Grand Commitment

When grandparents tune into their responsibility, they begin thinking and acting like their heavenly Father, and the results are often counter-cultural. In American culture we have narrowly defined the household and family, but it’s different in the majority of cultures across the world, where it is assumed that the family is multi-generational. In many Asian,

Middle Eastern and African cultures, families live together or close by, and grandparents help care for grandchildren.

Perhaps the most significant challenge to the American nuclear family comes from Scripture, where the Apostle Paul confronts householders with this admonition: “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). Was Paul restricting this comment to just the nuclear family, or was his concept of the household a multi-generational one? I believe the latter.

In a related comment, Jesus rebuked those who, under the guise of religiosity, failed to care for those in their family while saying their devotion to God was more important than their family, specifically, their parents. Jesus was not happy with their ideas and called them hypocrites. To express His passion, He quoted the prophet Isaiah: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God” (Mark 7:1-23).

(In other places, Jesus rebuked those who used their families as an excuse *not* to follow God wholeheartedly [see Matt. 8:21-22, 10:37 and Luke 14:25-27]. And of course, following God should be our top priority. However, where is He asking you to express His love and care? Could your family, including your grandchildren, be a big part of the ministry He is calling you to during this stage of life?)

The “bigger picture” of grandparenting can also include children who are not in our lives because of family connections. This was modeled in Scripture by two elderly folks who could be considered “spiritual” grandparents of Jesus. In the gospel of Luke we learn of Simeon and Anna, who waited at the temple for years praying, fasting and believing they would not die until they could hold and bless their Lord (Luke 2:25-38).

In American culture we have narrowly defined the household and family, but it’s different in the majority of cultures across the world, where it is assumed that the family is multi-generational.

“Do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them” (Deut. 4:9).

Their patient example stands in vivid contrast to grandparents who remain aloof, disconnected or unwilling to make the spiritual care of grandchildren a priority.

So what is keeping us from strengthening the relationships with our grandchildren? Do we need to make changes to address geographic barriers, or simply be more creative in reaching out to them? Are there more ways we can help cultivate their growing faith in Christ?

Let's not let cultural ideas and expectations about grandparents push us to the back burner. Don't follow the short-sighted idea that our retirement entitles us to just relax and enjoy what we have, and we're relieved of the responsibilities of investing in our grandchildren. And let's not buy into the naïve notion that our adult children now have their own families and we aren't needed, or we have nothing valuable to contribute. It may be natural to feel that way sometimes, but that's clearly inconsistent with God's plan.

3 Heroic Grandparents in Process

Fortunately, in spite of some distorted views about God's plan and a culture where the extended family is not always a priority, there are grand heroes emerging—heroes doing everything within their power to serve with humility and going the extra mile for their grandchildren.

Consider John. God prompted John to repent for not being the best father he could have been. When his daughter got pregnant out of wedlock, he didn't handle it well. She gave birth to a healthy baby girl, but her life was a mess in many ways. John's disappointment was obvious, and for a while his wife patiently gave him the space to come around. Then eventually she decided it was time to speak truth to him, and she challenged him to reach out to his daughter. This was no easy task for John, but he took his wife's counsel and his heart softened.

You could say John reverse-engineered the prodigal son's confession. Instead of waiting for his daughter to come to him and say; "Father I have sinned..." John proactively approached her and said, "Sweetheart, I have sinned by pursuing my work, my ministry and other priorities at the expense of being the dad you needed. Please forgive me. I want to rebuild and renew our relationship and begin one with my granddaughter. I want to become the best granddad I can be!" Of course, this was exactly what his daughter

needed to hear. With tears in her eyes, she said, "Dad, hold me. I'm so sorry for what I've done. Thank you for loving me again."

Jill, too, will likely emerge as a hero one day, but right now the jury is still out. She has agonized for years because her daughter betrayed her, disrespected her, embarrassed the family, and minimized her faith. And her daughter has now birthed two "out of wedlock" grandchildren. Jill is struggling to see how her forgiveness of her daughter's offenses will make any difference. There's something in Jill's eye that keeps her from seeing God's hand in the midst of the chaos, but His Spirit is moving. Once she opens herself up to reconciliation, she will see clearly that the depth of God's grace which covers her own sin covers her daughter's as well. And although things will never be perfect, as Jill learns to love unconditionally she may find healing with her daughter and establish a relationship with her grandchildren. So, Jill, why wait?

The Smiths represent a growing number of grandparents who are seeking access to their grandchildren—or primary custody. They hate seeing their grandson being used like a pawn by his mother, going back and forth between different living situations. They know their home would be the best environment for their grandson, and they were the ones who were there for him when his life was in shambles. He wants to be with them, and they're willing to make the necessary sacrifices to raise him, but convincing the court is another story, and the whole ordeal is taking its toll on them emotionally and financially. The Smiths exhibit a Joshua type of courage and strength in hopes of leading their grandson to the spiritual and physical inheritance he deserves.

These probably don't seem like the kinds of issues your grandparents had to deal with, but these situations are true stories where today's grandparents find themselves. When we fully commit to be there for our grands, sometimes God calls us to something unexpected, something we didn't know we were ready for. Sometimes grandparenting requires humility and courage. Sometimes being a grandparent is a ministry of reconciliation. Don't let any of that stop you from giving your very best to your grandchildren.

Exotic vacations are fine. Some relaxing may be well-deserved. Maybe you'll even have time to check off some "bucket list" goals. But please take a bold step of faith and make sure you find ways to give your very best to your grandchildren. Do all you can to help secure their faith and their future. 🙏

*...His Spirit is moving.
Once [Jill] opens herself up
to reconciliation, she will
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daughter's as well.*

Awaken & Empower Grandparents in Your Community

We can help you mobilize and equip grandparents in your community or church.

Jim Moore, founder of WATCH D.O.G.S. (Dads Of Great Students), is our National Director of Community & Business Relationships. He is currently organizing a limited number of leader's briefings and grandparenting events that you can bring to your community.



At the events, Dr. Ken Canfield will unpack the essentials of developing an initiative—highlighting research, key biblical truths, and practical tips and advice for grandparents. It's a perfect way to honor and encourage the grandparents in your community or church.

To find out more and schedule an event, contact Jim at jmoore@grandsmatter.org.



Ray Poteet is the founder of Living Wealth and a pioneer in helping families and small businesses recapture control of their finances through a process called Infinite Banking. He teaches good stewardship, including how to create and transfer wealth and become your own banker through private family financing.

His resources and philosophy, along with his free e-book, *The Tree of Wealth: How to Build a Legacy*, can be found at www.livingwealth.com.



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I remember the first time

we heard this news. It was February, and our daughter and son-in-law came by to give us Valentines, which were actually baby announcements—one for Grandpa and one for Grandma! We were thrilled—and momentarily shocked—at the idea of becoming grandparents! We just looked at each other with huge smiles and some tears. Immediately I went to my daughter to hug her and ask how she was feeling. My baby was going to have a baby! It was truly a grand moment.

Amazingly, just two months later my other daughter surprised us with a gift of *two* baby picture frames, one for both grandchildren on the way. This one was due in November! We were overflowing with joy and gratitude. We wanted the whole world to know, and I'm sure we bored our very patient and loving friends with how much we gushed about our happy news. It was similar with each of my ten grandchildren. Each announcement, and each child, was as special as the first one.

If you're a first-time grandparent-to-be, you will likely get past that initial rush of emotions and soon begin to ask, "Now what do I do?" You're going to be a grandparent, but you still have many months to wait for the blessed event. How can you prepare for grandchildren? Do you need special training? There are books on how to be a grandparent, but little material on how to prepare for this role.

In today's world, many of us can expect to be grandparents and even great-grandparents. Our health may be better than our own grandparents, and we will have the opportunity to play a significant and influential role in the lives of our grandchildren.

Being the organizer I am, I really took this waiting time seriously and had a lot of fun being creative in the planning. Here are my suggestions for how to make this time meaningful, productive, and fun.

Strengthen Family Bonds

When a new life in the family is being formed, it is a unique time to consider your family relationships and the heritage of this child, since family relationships do not occur in isolation but are imbedded within a family system. A study by Mueller and Elder on "Family Contingencies Across the Generations" found that grandparents' involvement is deeply influenced by their relationship with their own grandparents, as well as nuances in the relationship with their own children who are becoming parents.

It is important at this time to strive for strengthening family bonds, clearing up strained relationships, asking forgiveness, and communicating on a positive level. Establishing or re-establishing a healthy relationship with your own children will do nothing but benefit a future relationship with their children, your grandchildren! Do what is needed, as much as possible, to make peace in your family or get the help necessary to achieve it. Those strengthened family bonds will bless the new life that will soon be added to your family.



Strengthened family bonds will bless the new life that will soon be added to your family.

Things to Do While You Wait

Now that I have become a grandmother ten precious times, I would like to share with you some things I enjoyed doing to prepare for these new lives. Perhaps

these ideas might inspire you during your grandparent waiting period, which is a great time for grandparents to express their creativity.

1 One of our first conversations was about what we would be called. For me, I loved my maternal grandmother and preferred to call her “Grandma.” My fraternal grandmother was a fine woman, but more distant to me and she remained “Grandmother.” So, I was hoping to be called Grandma. However, there would be two sets of grandparents, and my daughter’s preferences were important too. Now is the time to talk about this issue, if it is important to you.

2 Being a child development teacher, I was very aware of the new life that was forming prenatally. I was quickly growing attached to this beginning life and wanted its reality to be more tangible. So I copied a prenatal chart that illustrates each month of growth and put it on my kitchen wall. I used a post-it note that said “Grandbaby #1” and moved it along as the baby grew, and then soon added one for “Grandbaby #2.” My guests and students enjoyed watching this progression, and I took a picture of it for the baby’s scrapbook. Part of becoming a grandparent is realizing that your own child is going to be a parent. I became nostalgic about my daughters’ early lives and wondered if their children would be like them. So I put together a scrapbook about each one’s early years so I’d be ready to tell my grandchildren those stories someday. I selected pictures that highlighted my daughters’ lives and interests, and wrote comments for my grandbabies, wondering about how they might become like mommy or daddy.

3 As I was becoming attached to each unborn grandchild, I wrote a letter to him or her describing how excited we were to have him/her join the family and the preparations being made. I described what the parents were experiencing, how mommy was looking, how the siblings were preparing, and what the nursery looked like. I also told the baby something special about his/her unique position in the family, how I was excited for this new family member, and that I was looking forward to watching him/her grow and develop unique talents and interests. Prior to the birth, I gave these letters to the parents to put in the child’s baby book to be part of the child’s history and to be read whenever desired.

4 Naturally, we were eager to start buying things for the child. I find it important to communicate with the expectant parents about their needs and desires before going too far with purchasing. I enjoyed shopping for a maternity outfit with them and also selecting a crib of their choice as our main purchase, which would last for all the children they would have. I enjoyed making a quilt that matched the selected color scheme. For the second child I might buy a double stroller or make a quilt for the older child as it moves into a big bed. But again, grandparents need to make sure this is about what *they* want and not our own dreams or desires.

As the Birth Approaches

As the big day grows near, it is important to keep communicating with the expectant parents about their desires and needs. Some might want you in the birthing room, and some won't. Some will want you to help at their home after the birth, and some won't. Respect their

wishes and do not have your own personal agenda—they are the main players in this drama. Be a welcome help and not an unwelcome intrusion. Remember that birthing procedures and methods change, so be ready to be flexible.

As you prepare for your role during and after the birth, you might consider:

- 1 Getting directions to the hospital, compiling a list of whom to call and the phone numbers, and having the camera ready.
- 2 If you are going to stay with them, have your bags packed and clear your schedule as much as possible. I also liked to tuck in my favorite recipes and some non-perishable food ingredients.
- 3 If it is not the first child, be sure to take something to do with the other children. They will need your attention most of all, and loving and entertaining them may be the greatest way you can help during this time.
- 4 Remember that your role is to be a support and encouragement to the new parents. It's good to allow them to enjoy focused time on the new baby and let them be the parents—not you. Your role, assuming they want your help, is to keep the home, food, laundry, and activities running smoothly so they can rest as much as possible and bond with the baby. Give advice only when it's asked for, and be a source of unconditional love and faith in their ability to be parents. Have a resilient spirit.
- 5 This is a good time to start journaling about the child's life. I have ten separate journals, one for each grandchild. Periodically I write things the grandchildren have said or done, or about events we have experienced together, and I often include their art work or pictures. Sometimes I have the children draw or write in their journal to help record their development. I hope these journals will be a source of fun memories and delight when the grandchildren are older.

- 6 During the first year of each new grandchild's life, my husband started a savings account for their future education, and I have enjoyed keeping that tradition since he died. There may be other creative ways you can help support the child's future.
- 7 My children gave me a grandmother necklace with charms for each grandchild, and that very full necklace is my treasure. Find ways to celebrate the joy that comes with your new role.

For some, becoming a grandparent may be stressful. Maybe the circumstances are not what you desired. Special situations such as single parenting, illness, fragmented relationships, or distance may dampen the joy. But even then, please stay positive. You can find courage, wisdom, and love beyond what was thought possible in these special circumstances. A grandchild is a new life, a new beginning, a new hope. Some have found good friends, wise elders, and helpful resources to be extremely valuable during the transition to grandparenthood.

Enjoy this magical time and anticipate all the delightful years ahead as a grandparent. There is nothing quite so special as driving up to your grandchild's home and having them run out and say, "Yea, Grandma is here!" You feel like a celebrity. And to them, you are! 



Susan Giboney retired as Professor of Education and Human Development at Pepperdine University. She is the mother of three and grandmother of 10. Susan serves on several boards, including the Boone Center for the Family and the Associated Women for Pepperdine. She enjoys teaching a premarital class and a class in a women's prison. She is a speaker, author and teacher, and lives in Malibu, California.

Grandparenting at Its Best

Listening, Learning and Leading

Ken Canfield, Ph.D.



What if you could strengthen your bond with your grandchildren by focusing on a few simple skills?

Whether you're a grandfather of many like me, a surrogate grandparent to one, or somewhere in between, the following common-sense skills will be a solid addition to your grandparenting experience. They are the three Ls of "grandparenting at its best":

Listening

For decades I have been a proponent of the importance of active listening, whether we're talking about marriage, parenting, work situations, grandparenting or just about anything else.

I first learned about the power of active listening from a grandmother in a nursing home. For thirteen years I watched over the affairs of an elderly widow named Rose, having been appointed her conservator in a court proceeding. Rose lived to be 103, and from age 90 till the day she passed, I got to know her very well. She was always delighted to see me and my family.

Rose had some incredibly fascinating stories to tell, having lived in three different centuries—from 1898 until

2002. She experienced the effects of World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, the turbulent sixties, the end of the Cold War and a host of other historic events.

However, Rose would not opine as much on world events as she would about the renters of her properties, whom she served and treated as her extended family. She would tell me stories, with life lessons, about her best and worst renters over the years. Those stories, which she repeated again and again, contained many mundane details about each person or couple. And even though I could have recited them verbatim, she was always watching me closely as she talked to see if I was really listening. If she saw I was attentive, she would often throw in extra details, with life lessons I hadn't heard. When I listened closely, her nuggets of wisdom would surface.

In order to draw her out more and hear the depth of her heart, I would sit in a chair facing her wheelchair and look intently into her eyes, nodding my approval. Looking back, I

was doing my best to practice active listening skills: attentiveness, tuning out other distractions, eye contact, and sincere empathy. And I believe that encouraged Rose to open up, share profound insights, and pass on her wisdom, history and experiences. During those years I learned about the benefits of active listening, and I have applied them with my children and now my grandchildren.

Think about your grandchildren. How could active listening strengthen your relationships with them? In what specific ways can your attentive ears

help them grow and mature?

A strategic way to enhance your grandparent/grandchild relationships is to use questions or short statements. These questions and statements are not an interrogation; they're stepping stones to open up dialogues with your

grandchildren and to get glimpses of their world. Thoughtful questions can also lead to deeper discussions about issues or concerns you may want to bring up with them.

As a grandparent, you can enhance their learning and your relationship by asking questions that help your grandchildren dream.

Think about how young and growing grandchildren love to ask questions. Researchers remind us that between the ages of two and six, children will ask upwards of 40,000 questions. But as soon as they reach school age or begin formal learning, instead of asking questions, we ask them to sit down in their seat and “we will tell you everything you need to know.” That’s the sad state of how much of our formal educational process works, but it’s the way we have chosen to go. As a grandparent, you can enhance their learning and your relationship by asking questions that help your grandchildren dream. Here are a few questions you can ask your grandchildren to strengthen your bond.

What do you like or dislike about school?

Who are your best friends and why do you like them?

Tell me, what makes you happy?

What do you want to do when you grow up?

Who is your favorite teacher or coach? What do you like about them?

How can I help you reach your dreams and goals?

What is a phrase that describes your life at home? (Assuming you are not your grandchild’s primary caretaker.)

If I gave you a special gift of \$50, how would you spend it? (They will really like this question.)

These questions and many others could be the doorway to help you grow in understanding your grandchildren and strengthening those relationships. (For more ideas, go to grandsmatter.org and search for the phrase,

“Questions we should be asking our grandchildren.”) Without questions, you really can’t build an inquisitive, active mind. Of course, that doesn’t mean you don’t provide content or important facts when discussing issues with them. Rather, the questions you ask reveal your deep desire to really know your grandchild.

Learning

In addition to active listening, another aspect of “grandparenting at its best” is learning ... *together!* The learning process is a wonderful opportunity to share life and make a meaningful contribution to your grandchildren. There are many traditional grandparent/grandchild activities that are learning experiences, even if we don’t always think of them that way. Some examples are: baking cookies, fishing, gardening, playing a game, pursuing a hobby, or teaching a skill. If you have a family business, that’s a terrific setting to teach them numerous practical business skills and, most important, to teach them how to serve others. Or you can have them teach you something, like how to use the latest app on your phone.

The learning process involves so much more than simply exchanging information. We are mentoring, smiling, challenging and teaching our grandchildren the basic skills they need to establish themselves in the world. As a bonus of initiating a learning experience, our brains light up—our neurons are firing and the overall result is

improved health. Our brains need stimulation, and when we exercise them by learning new things, it helps to prevent Alzheimer’s and other neuro-degenerative brain diseases.

The benefits to our grandkids are equally profound. Each time we learn something together, our brains are literally changing and growing through rewiring of neurotransmitters. Research has shown that learning a new skill improves our working memory, heightens our verbal IQ, and enhances our language skills. We can (and should) help cultivate that kind of development in our grandchildren!

Perhaps the biggest gain in learning with our grandchildren is the deep emotional satisfaction that comes from passing on a tradition or skill. Each teaching experience involves a time investment, whether it’s fifteen minutes or spending hours together on a project that lasts weeks or months. And the activity, while important, is also setting the stage for us to build stronger connections to our grandchildren and their world, which is growing increasingly complex.

As lifelong learners, we also need to grow in our understanding of our role in the world of grandparenting. Think about all the variations of grandparents. We have traditional grandparents, step-grandparents, single grandparents, grandparents raising grandchildren, grandparents seeking access to their grandchildren after a divorce or family crisis, foster grandparents, adoptive grandparents, long-distance grandparents, surrogate, and even spiritual grandparents. Each grandparenting situation presents unique and often daunting challenges, and the

Each time we learn something together, our brains are literally changing and growing through rewiring of neurotransmitters.

complexities only increase when the roles combine and overlap. (One of our goals at *Grands Matter* is to address the challenges of each of those situations.)

In addition, connecting with our grandchildren is often complicated by the issues *they* are facing, such as: body image, drug use, safety concerns, sexual abuse, gender identity, violence and bullying in schools, internet safety, stress, cutting, tattoos, body piercings, sexting, smoking and tobacco use, teen pregnancy, as well as physical, mental or health challenges. Again, we are here for grandparents and will be collecting data and providing help for these issues as we're able.

Bottom line, we grandparents need to be thinking a step ahead of our grandchildren. What does that mean? I'm not proposing that we become grandparent psychologists; rather, we need to be discoverers of new insights, always learning from other grandparents and seeking out reliable sources of information. Most of all, we need to initiate learning experiences which will help our grandchildren and us to grow together.

So, what is our primary source of information with respect to our grandchildren? While it's good to confer regularly with their parents and other mentors in their lives as we're able, it's best to learn from our grandchildren themselves. We can ask lots of questions, but we must go a step further. What non-verbal clues are we picking up? In many cultures, communication is more about how something is said than the words themselves, and we should also be watching and learning from our grandchildren's actions and body language.

Do you know your grandchildren's love languages, their vocational aptitudes, their personality bent, their pas-

sion and hope for the future? In addition to these, what about their biggest fear, their most embarrassing moment, their most prized possession, their greatest accomplishment, their athletic strengths, their musical abilities, or their artistic skills?

When it comes to learning about your grandchildren, there are some great treasures which you as a grandparent can unlock. And the key to that lock may be the initiative you take to create those opportunities to learn new things together, which can then open doors to communication and further insights and benefits.

Also, remember that your knowledge of your grandchild, your insights, and your perspective are an added bonus for you grandchild. Unless you are raising your grandchildren, your limited exposure to them provides you with different views of their development. Small changes which their parents may not notice might be more evident to you if you only see the grandkids every couple of weeks or months. And you have time to ponder what you've observed in your grandchildren and to consider new ways to learn and grow together.

Leading

Our world is in great need of leadership, and I believe healthy leadership emanates from humility. The effective leaders of tomorrow can be greatly influenced by grandparents who are gently leading their grand-

children and encouraging them, in turn, to lead. When grandchildren are young, their leadership potential is in formation. Allowing them to win in a game or to take a leadership role in a hobby, a learning experience or an outing (appropriate to their age) will help them to develop confidence.

Typically, grandchildren will follow their grandparent's lead, unless they have a type-A personality and come out of the womb trying to dictate to everyone how life is to be lived. With those grandchildren, grandparents have to be thinking *two* steps ahead, much like their grandchild's parent, and this is where a tag-team approach between grandparents and parents is especially helpful. A type-A child can be exhausting work

for everybody, but doing the work required will produce incredible long-term dividends.

There are two primary areas where grandparents can have a meaningful influence on their grandchildren's leadership development. The first is *helping them create a reservoir of trust*. Being able to trust others is essential in all relationships, and critical to a grandchild's future. Without developing trust, children can succumb to a fear-based lifestyle and way of thinking. But when trust is fully developed, their fears, challenges and difficulties can be addressed more easily, knowing that together you can overcome any obstacles and difficulties.

When it comes to developing trust with your grandchildren, I see four cornerstones where grandparents can

Helping your grandchildren grow in discernment can be accomplished by telling stories about good and bad choices you have made and how they have impacted your life.

really make a difference, and they all work together to lay the groundwork for your grandchild's house of trust:

Your age and experience—your maturity. You share your life experiences and wisdom through ...

Healthy communication, which of course is characterized by ...

Truth and honesty. And since your words only go so far, you back them up with ...

Consistency in your habits and lifestyle.

I have two close friends who were literally saved by their grandfathers' involvement in their lives and the trust they developed over time. Each of my friends' fathers were incarcerated, and as young men they found themselves fatherless, defenseless and in need. In each case their grandfathers stepped in, engaged in their development, and over time helped their grandsons become leaders. And when these two grandfathers died, both left their homes to their grandsons. These two men also quickly earned my trust; I would trust each of them with anything of value. It's obvious they were endowed with trust by their grandfathers.

Along with trust, *future leaders need discernment*. Without discernment, your grandchildren may be vulnerable to the whims of the culture, which seem to get stranger and healthier every day. In a world with many shades of gray, discernment is sorely needed.

Teaching discernment means helping your grandchildren navigate between

what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong. They will need discernment as they make all kinds of decisions throughout life: regarding their friends, their lifestyle, the media and entertainment they watch or listen to, the games they play, the money they spend, and ultimately, the life they lead. Where there is little or no discernment, our grandchildren can falter.

As grandparents, helping your grandchildren grow in discernment can be accomplished by telling stories about good and bad choices you have made and how they have impacted your life. My grandchildren love to hear me tell about my lack of discernment growing up—and they like to hear those stories over and over.

One of their favorites is from a time in my childhood, right before Halloween, when I took two candy bars from a supply that the Girl Scouts were saving for their meeting. As a consequence, my father didn't let me trick-or-treat that year. My punishment was to stand at our front door and pass out candy to all the trick-or-treaters. My grandkids smile

with delight when I tell them what that was like, and it becomes a talking point for why we shouldn't steal.

This is our challenge: At appropriate times in their lives, are you communicating to your grandchildren about the truth that has "set you free"? Are you looking for teachable moments that come along to briefly share with them about that truth? Are you open to sharing how that truth has set you free?

Another important part of teaching children discernment is helping them

contrast the real from the fake. Things that are true and authentic should emanate from a grandparent's speech and life. We can help keep them from being led astray by giving them lots of exposure to our integrity.

Here's an example using American currency. What's the best way to train someone to spot a counterfeit \$100 bill? It might seem wise to make the person aware of the common methods of copying the original, and then use fake bills as examples of what to look for. But actually, the primary method for training employees to spot counterfeits is a thorough study of *authentic* \$100 bills. When someone is very, very familiar with the real thing, down to precise details, then it's much easier to spot a fake.

That's how it is with us! We need to live authentically and stand for what we believe, and allow our grandchildren opportunities to be very familiar with us and our values.

Next Steps

With these three aspects of grandparenting in focus—Listening, Learning and Leading—we can accomplish much. Putting these simple skills into practice can drive us to deeper considerations about our goals and purposes as grandparents.

So, here's a teaser for my "Grandparenting at Its Best" article in our next issue: If you were to craft a mission statement for your grandparenting, what would it look like? More specifically, what are your goals, plans and hopes for your grandchildren, and how are you fulfilling them? Writing such a document can be powerful.

Until then, may your listening increase, your learning expand, and your leadership as a grandparent be intentional. 

As a grandparent, you can enhance their learning and your relationship by asking questions that help your grandchildren dream.

Matters for Grands

"I asked my 14-year-old grandson the other day, 'What are grandparents supposed to do?' 'Tell stories,' he quickly replied. 'What kind of stories?' I asked. 'Old ones,' he answered."

- J. Allan Petersen

GRANDPARENT FACTS

7.2
MILLION

The number of grandparents whose grandchildren under age 18 were living with them in 2014.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, Table B10050

5.8
MILLION

The number of children under age 18 living with a grandparent householder in 2014. Nearly half (2.7 million) were under age 6.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, Table B10001



Grandparenting Inspiration

*"Beginnings.
The older you get,
the more rare
they become."*

*"Endings are
too often on my
mind. I pray for
new beginnings."*



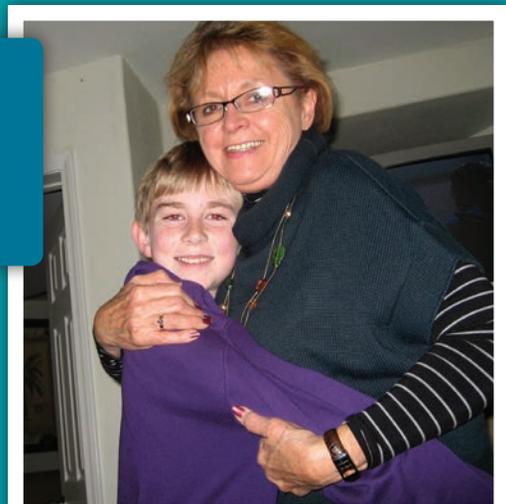
If you're a grandparent, you must see this video, produced by moments.org. Watch it at www.grandsmatter.org/newbeginnings

"How beautiful, however, is the encouragement an elderly person manages to pass on to a young person who is seeking the meaning of faith and of life! It is truly the mission of grandparents, the vocation of the elderly. The words of grandparents have special value for the young. And the young know it."

—Pope Francis, "Poets of Prayer."
General Audience, March 11, 2015.

Priceless Moments

Do you have a fantastic grandparenting photo you'd like to share in *Grands Matter*? Just email a high-resolution version to us at info@grandsmatter.org





Your Stories...

Do you want to give your grandkids a strong sense of family history? Tell them stories.

Here are some thoughts to help you remember memorable events from your past:

- What was it like growing up?
- What were your grandparents like?
- What were your children (their parents) like as children?
- Did you live through a war? A disaster of some kind?
- What was your first car like?
- Where did you go on vacations as a child?
- What have been the most beautiful places you have visited?
- What was your most embarrassing moment?
- What sports did you play growing up?
- Did you and your siblings pull off practical jokes?
- What was your house like as a child? Your school?
- What's the history of your last name (or your maiden name)?

Pull out old photos, yearbooks, awards or other mementos, and share stories about them.

Collect those memories, and then pass them on to your grandkids.

In order of importance, adults said that grandparents should:

- 1) Model Integrity
- 2) Establish Traditions
- 3) Leave an Inheritance
- 4) Initiate Celebrations

Based on a study of 196 adults, with a mean age of 44 yrs., when asked to report on memories and interactions with their grandparents

“Grandparents...so easy to operate, even a child can do it.”



**FORGET
KEEPING
CALM.
THE
GRANDKIDS
ARE
COMING.**



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When Grandchildren Have Disabilities

by Judd Swihart

Our grandchild Hezekiah was about four or five years old when, during the course of our conversation, he looked me in the eye and sincerely asked, “Opa, how old will I have to be before I can walk like the other kids?” The question stabbed me like a knife, but I did not flinch on the outside.

Since Hezekiah was born with spina bifida, he is paraplegic. He is now eleven years old and, of course, uses his wheelchair most of the time. We have eleven grandchildren, and during family gatherings he is an active participant in the grandkid gang, sometimes with necessary accommodations made so he can be in the mix.

I’m proud of the way my son and his wife have adjusted their family and lifestyle for this one child’s unique situation. As grandparents, we too have had to find our way in relating to him, and I’d like to share some of our observations. We realize that all disabilities are different—whether physical or mental and ranging from mild to severe—and family sit-

uations and personalities are unique. All of these affect the grandparent relationship.

So, realizing that every situation is different and there’s no single “right” way to be a grandparent, here are some principles to consider:

1) Observe how the parents are dealing with the disability.

Each family has its own personality and its own way of parenting a child with a disability. As long as the parents’ approach is healthy, grandparents can help to provide con-

sistency for the child by using a similar approach. Try to adapt to and reinforce that parenting style. As grandparents, you can encourage and enrich what they are already doing. Depending on the disability, the parents are already putting in extra effort, and helpful support from the grandparents is usually much appreciated.

2) Be honest with your grandchild.

Hezekiah's parents have talked openly with him about being paraplegic and what that will mean to him. As he ages, he is gaining a better and deeper understanding of this. When he asked me about when he would be able to walk like the other kids, I tried to be gently honest with him. As hard as it was, I explained that he would never be able to walk because his legs did not work right. I then took off my glasses and said, "Hezekiah, see my eyes? My eyes don't work right and I can't see well. For you, it's your legs that don't work right, so you will not be able to walk."

I was surprised when he said, almost casually, "Oh, so I won't ever be able to walk." He then moved on to another conversation. I had the sense that, at least intellectually, he already knew this and was just processing it. Although his parents have been open and honest with him, he needed to talk about it with someone other than his parents. And he needed that person to be honest as well.

3) Find ways to include your grandchild in activities the rest of the family is doing.

Sometimes you may have to take extra steps, but it is important for the grandchild to be part of the action and not sitting like a train on a side track. We include Hezekiah on his level whenever possible. In the winter, when the grandchildren help split and stack fire wood, they each have a task. Two of them bring wood to the splitter and carry the split pieces to the wood stack. While I load the logs on the splitter, Hezekiah runs the hydraulic wedge because he can sit in one spot and work the lever. He is an integral part of the firewood crew.

When his immediate family goes camping or hiking, Hezekiah goes too. His dad has modified an outdoor wheelchair with handles so the rest of the family can pull him over rough terrain or up the side of a steep incline. He is there, participating with everyone else.

4) Find activities where your grandchild can succeed.

A couple of weeks ago I hired Hezekiah and his two younger brothers to paint an old shed. Hezekiah painted the lower portion because that was what he could reach, and the other two painted the upper portion because they could stand and reach higher. Was this a professional looking paint job? No, but it wasn't really about a shed needing to be painted. It was about three boys looking with pride on what they were able to do. And it actually turned out looking pretty good considering the work crew.

The ability to achieve and accomplish helps to build a grandchild's skills and confidence, especially when there is a disability involved. Regardless of the ability or disability, I encourage grandparents to be intentional and creative in finding jobs and activities their grandchildren can achieve with success.

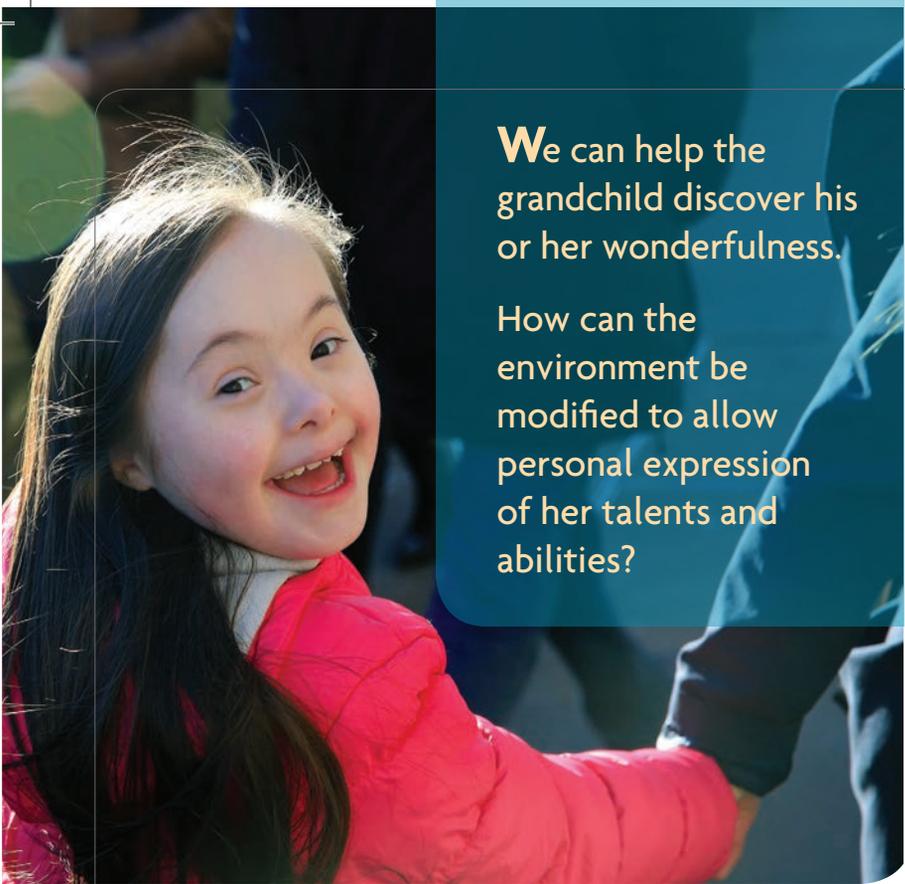
5) Do not underestimate what your grandchild can do.

As a grandparent, it is important *not* to be overly protective of your grandchild. So often that leads to underestimating what he or she can accomplish. Hezekiah has great upper body strength but no use of his legs. When he was about three years old, he announced to his father, "I am going to climb trees." His father explained that this would be difficult because of getting up to the first limb. Undaunted, he replied, "E.J. [his older brother] will lift me up to the first limb, and I will be able to climb from there." At an early age he recognized what he could not do, assessed his need, and came up with a solution to the problem.

Too often we grandparents are overly cautious and underestimate a grandchild's ability. We have to consistently check ourselves as to whether we are correctly assessing what he or she can handle. At times we may need to suggest activities that challenge the outer limits of what we think (or what the grandchild thinks) is possible. Remember, it may be better for him to try some activity and find that he cannot quite complete it than to never be challenged to try it.

6) See beyond the handicap.

When there is a major disability, it's easy to see the child only through that lens. We can get caught just looking at the disability and forget about the rest of his personality.



We can help the grandchild discover his or her wonderfulness.

How can the environment be modified to allow personal expression of her talents and abilities?

Like looking at a beautiful sunset that is beyond the horizon, sometimes we need to look past the handicap and see him as his own person—much more than just the disability. He is first and foremost a grandchild; we can't let the disability define him in our eyes. The relationship can be limited if we focus too much on the disability.

I'm not saying we should deny that there are real limitations. We need to accept the fact that the child does have a disability. However, we should not make the disability the totality of our view of him, nor our relationship with him.

7) Help develop your grandchild's giftedness.

In the Bible, the Psalmist writes, "For You have formed my inward parts: You have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Your works" (Psalm 139:13-14). This doesn't apply only to those without disabilities. Grandchildren with disabilities are also wonderfully made.

As grandparents, it is to everyone's benefit if we can help the grandchild discover his or her wonderfulness. How is she gifted? What natural talent and abilities does she possess? Can these gifts be expressed in spite of her limitations? How can the environment be modified to allow personal expression of her talents and abilities?

For example, Hezekiah has a keen interest in art and photography. Last year his sketches won second place at a local youth art contest. Often for birthdays, we have tried to give him art supplies along with outdoor toys like bow and arrows. He has also received video classes on photography. We are simply trying to give him opportunities to develop his gifts and interests.

In addition to physical, intellectual, and emotional maturation, it's important to keep a grandchild's spiritual development in mind as well. As he gets older, you'll see more and more of his spiritual gifts emerging, and he can use them to bless others. His ability to participate in a faith community and minister to others can become the most important part of his life, in spite of what some may consider to be a handicap. Perhaps that ability will even be enhanced by the handicap.

We grandparents should be asking ourselves if there might be something bigger happening through our grandchild's disability. God often has greater purposes than what first meets the eye, and perhaps He wants to bless us, challenge us, or teach us something about Himself through our grandchild, just as he is.

In some ways, many of the above principles apply to all grandchildren, regardless of the circumstances, although there are unique challenges with some grandchildren. Whatever the situation with our grandchildren, we grandparents should devote ourselves to building up their generation.

My experiences and suggestions do not make up a comprehensive picture of what it takes to have a good relationship with a grandchild who happens to have a disability, but I hope I have provided some food for thought and prayer, and some encouragement for grandparents to become an integral part of building up their grandchildren.



Judd Swihart and his wife Nancy are parents of three grown children and grandparents of eleven grandchildren. Judd has conducted research on the grandparent-grandchild relationship for his Ph.D. dissertation, and he's a member of the Advisory Board for the National Association

of Grandparenting. He and Nancy have individually authored or co-authored six books on family relationships.



Got Grandkids?

Those children you love so much
need you more than you know.

They may live near, far, or right under your roof. They may be sailing and smiling through life. Or they may be headed for tough times.

Every family is different, but one thing is sure: When you reach out with love, joy, and purpose, your grandkids benefit. Big time.

You would give your life for those little ones. **Are you ready to reach out to them? Do you know how?**

“Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged.”

- Proverbs 17:6

Grandparents are needed NOW – maybe more than ever.

Grandparents (and grandchildren) today face a diverse set of situations and challenges, and we can all benefit by supporting each other and sharing the best ideas, resources and encouragement. There is a lot at stake, and together we can make a difference.

That’s why we’re here at Grands Matter and the National Association for Grandparenting. There’s no better way to invest in the future than giving your very best for your grandchildren.



GrandsMatter, the new magazine from the National Association for Grandparenting, is a great tool to help you make that critical connection.

Join us at www.grandsmatter.org/member



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grandsMatter

Connecting hearts. Uniting generations.

Innovative, Beautiful, Renewing

for you, your family, and community.

Grands Matter and the National Association for Grandparenting have established a relationship with Ron Reid Associates, Scenic Development and Pivotal Health Care. These pioneering companies have been developing facilities and providing exceptional care for grandparents and seniors for over four decades!

If your church or community has a desire to strengthen their outreach to the elderly and they have land for development, we can assist you in this process and help your vision become a reality.

A NEW PARTNERSHIP



To find out more about how this partnership can serve you, contact us at: www.grandsmatter.org/grandliving

