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Action points for effective grandparents

By Don Schmitz

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Being an involved grandparent doesn't come without a little work. The roots of grandparenting are formed early on. It's important to let your children know you want to be supportive to their family. Here are some ways to get started.

- Make up your mind to be a better grandparent than you were as a parent. It's never too late to change.
- Talk with your children about how they see you becoming involved with their children. Let them know what your intentions are. Be involved in the planning and do your fair share of the work.
- Talk to your grandchildren about what they would like to do with you.
- Involve your grandchildren in the activities you choose to do with your grandchildren. Do activities that are age appropriate and do things you like to do. Examples might be cooking, hiking, camping, crafts, dancing, singing, sports and storytelling.
- Take time to do these activities one on one as much as possible. Kids need a break once in a while from their parents. Remember children behave differently when their parents aren't around.
- If you can't be physically present with your grandchildren because of distance, be there in other ways. Some examples might be e-mails, letters, phone calls, gift giving, video and pictures and activity books. Any activity between families takes coordination. Don't wait for the kids to come to you.
- Tell stories of your past.
- Let your grandchild know how human you are. Your wisdom gained through experience has taught us to be more open to our emotions. Share your happiness, sadness, fears, embarrassments and mistakes.
- Talk about your religion, talk about the lessons you've learned in your life, talk about their parents and the fun you had raising them.
- When you are together with the parents, say only good things about your time together.

Yes, our precious little grandchildren will have faults; look where they came from, but love them with no conditions...this is the greatest gift we can bestow on our grandchildren.

Don Schmitz is a popular speaker and writer on parenting and grandparenting. He is the author of *The New Face of Grandparenting ...Why Parents Need Their Own Parents* and founder of Grandkidsandme, which includes: Grandparent Camps and Grandkid Days. Don holds graduate degrees in Education, Administration, Human Development and is father to three sons and seven grandchildren. Contact Don@grandkidsandme.com.

How to Nurture a Long Distance Relationship With Grandchildren

By Veronica Scott

One of the most fulfilling relationships is the one between grandchildren and their grandparents. Unfortunately, many are not able to enjoy this privilege because they live miles away from their loved ones. People keep moving for several reasons such as health, career, school, retirement or even adventure. Rarely are three generations in a family able to live together within close proximity or make these relocations together, which leads to grandchildren being separated from their grandparents. The relationship between these two groups of people needs nourishing on a constant basis and may not be as easy when they are far apart. However, there are several things that grandparents can do to strengthen the relationships with their grandchildren. This is to avoid being forgotten or becoming strangers to their own grandchildren.

Grandparents should ensure they maintain communication at all times. This has actually been made easier as technology continues to advance. Grandparents who are not computer literate may need to acquire these skills to keep constant communication with their grandchildren (most of who are computer literate). Some of the things they can send through this form of technology include emails, recipes, computer games, jokes/gossip and letters. Faxes are also useful and can be used to send report cards, jokes or drawings back and forth. Telephone communication is also important since both parties can hear each other's voices.

Convening family conferences with children and making sure that grandchildren are present is very helpful. During school holidays, children can visit their grandparents to enjoy activities such as fishing, hunting or grandma's cooking. Time set aside to be spent by children with their grandparents without 'interruption' should become a favorite tradition to ensure consistency and avoid random get-togethers, which may not take place. If meeting on a regular basis is not possible, the children need to be reassured that their grandparents will do their best to maintain communication with them and see them as often as possible. Such hearty statements are likely to encourage the children to also make effort and work on their relationship with their grandparents.

A person can actively take certain measures and invite their children and grandchildren to come up with action plans that can help the children spend adequate time with them as their grandparents. A certain percentage of family resources can be designated for this purpose to make sure it happens and does not fail due to financially related reasons. Children's attention is more easily captured through creative activities that are fun to do. What's more, coming up with these activities may only require little effort and are great in enhancing relationships with grandchildren.

Cultivating consistent communication and a warm relationship between grandchildren and their grandparents helps to prevent time gaps where both groups feel like total strangers to each other. Sending each other information on any progress such as pictures taken during adventure trips can help prevent this. It also prevents incidents where children grow up and forget everything to do with their grandparents, which can be quite unsettling for the entire family.

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