

# Thoughts on Grandparenting

**The Joys of Grandparenting**

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We often speak of the joys of being a grandparent. Have I mentioned, lately, my granddaughter, Maddie, or my grandson, Brooks. They are my bundles of joy. My colleagues at the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension have written a publication, *Being a "Grand" Parent*, that explores the benefits derived from being a grandparent as well as suggestions for being the kind of grandparent that will benefit the grandchild.

Researchers have found that grandparents receive benefits from their grandparenting roles. The research confirms many of the things we grandparents already know:

- We enjoy having grandchildren and knowing that the family line will continue.
- We can impact the future through our youngest generation.
- We can use our years of accumulated child rearing experience to be even better grandparents than we were parents.
- We can receive a great deal of satisfaction from our grandchildren's smallest achievements.
- We have an opportunity to be even more emotionally available to our grandchildren than we were to our children.

The average age for becoming a grandmother is 46 and may happen even earlier. This means that we need to set aside many outdated ideas about grandparents. We are active people. We do not necessarily get around slowly or hold old-fashioned ideas. Nor are we people with a lot of time on our hands, just

waiting around to help with the babysitting. In fact, at least half the grandmothers and almost all the grandfathers of young children are employed and may be at the peak of their careers. Many grandparents are also faced with caring for their aging parents and perhaps even their grandparents. In light of the demands on today's grandparents, we still want to have a vital role in the lives of our grandchildren.

Like all of us, grandchildren thrive in an atmosphere of appreciation and encouragement. Find things you like about your grandchildren and let them know. With sincerity and speaking from your heart, practice positive communication. Back up your words with enthusiasm, hugs, smiles, pats on the back and other nonverbal gestures of support and caring.

Grandparents who focus on a child's positive behavior, generally, have fewer discipline problems. Most children spend great stretches of time behaving well. This deserves recognition. Give grandchildren The attention for what they are doing right. Positive recognition shows a child they can get the attention they need without misbehaving. Whenever your grandchildren do something special for themselves or others, acknowledge that behavior and tell them you appreciate it. A child tends to repeat a behavior that has been noticed---so notice the positives.

Most children develop their attitudes about aging as the result of relationships with their grandparents. Negative views of growing old multiply unless children spend

positive time with their grandparents or other pleasant older people. Active grandparents live longer, healthier lives, with less memory loss and illness. Recent brain research indicates that as we get older, enriching and fulfilling environments may result in less neuron loss and the growth of new synapses. Spending positive time with your grandchildren can certainly be fulfilling and may keep you healthier. If your grandchildren do not live nearby, arrange visits as often as possible and strive to maintain an emotionally close relationship even if you are miles apart. Consider offering to be a substitute

grandparent to other young people in your community.

Many older men and women report that they find more satisfaction in their grandchildren and great-grandchildren than they ever did with their own children, when the pressures of parenthood weighted heavily upon them. Finding joy in grandparenthood seems to be a gift given to us that helps to compensate for some of the other aspects of aging that are not nearly as much fun.

Have I told you lately about my grandchildren.....

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