



Visits *with* Grandchildren

K. DeHart, S. R. Bowman, and A. J. Walker

Frequent and regular contact will help you develop a positive relationship with your grandchildren. Visits give you a chance to spend time together—with and without your grandchildren's parents—getting to know each other's interests and stories.

Planning will help you make the most of your visits with your grandchildren.

When grandchildren visit without their parents

Make them feel expected and wanted in your home. Find out what their favorite foods are and prepare some of these dishes in advance. Determining what activities most interest your grandchildren before they arrive will give you the chance to have supplies on hand.

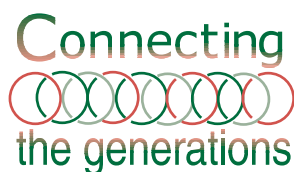
Encourage grandchildren to bring a favorite book, game, or toy to share with you.

Set up a special area, if possible, for your grandchildren's belongings. This may decrease noise and disorder elsewhere in the house. The privacy may be appreciated by the grandchildren—especially as they get older—and you'll appreciate it, too.

It's better for a visit to be too short than too long. Leave your grandchildren wanting more, not in a hurry to go home.

Put away hazardous materials (cleaning supplies, medicines, paints, etc.) that could cause harm. Very small children will require extra precautions such as safety locks and car seats. (Contact your local health department for child safety guidelines.) Put away any valuable items that might be damaged.

Keep housework and other preparations to a minimum so you won't be tired when you need your energy the most. Be well rested before they arrive.



Establish a schedule that considers your usual routine as well as your grandchildren's regular activities. Help young grandchildren feel secure by making as few changes in their routines as possible.

What to do?

Plan simple activities. Walking to the park, going to the library, or going on a picnic are outings that are inexpensive, manageable, and fun. Plan a few rainy-day activities and quiet times as well. Have crayons, colored paper, play dough, and paints on hand.

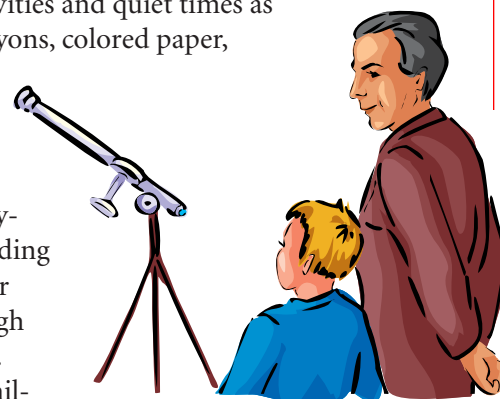
Children also may enjoy playing cards, building a birdhouse, or looking through photo albums.

Older grandchildren may enjoy using

a computer, learning a craft, participating in outdoor activities, or renting videos or video games.

Find out what your community offers for children. A concert in the park, a children's museum, a wildlife refuge, a public swimming pool, or a community festival are a few of the many possibilities.

If your grandchildren live in a large city, they may enjoy a trip to the corner store or a visit to a neighbor's farm. If you're the city dweller and your grandchildren live in the country, consider an excursion to the top of the tallest building or to a large mall.



How to make the visit work for everyone

Be available. Take time from work or your regularly scheduled activities to make the most of your time together.

Be flexible. Rigid expectations of how the visit will go may lead to disappointment.

Be sensible. Don't overschedule. Tired children—and adults—quickly become cranky. Consider your limits and those of your grandchildren.

Establish traditions. Activities shared during each visit provide continuity if you see your grandchildren infrequently. Memories of fishing trips, visits to a museum, or pies baked with freshly picked berries will linger in their minds long after the visit has ended.

Follow their lead. Allow grandchildren to select activities for a day. Provide two or three options, then let them decide.

It's okay to say no. You're not obligated to do everything your grandchildren would like to do.

Ideally, your rules for your grandchildren will be consistent with those of their parents. It's fine, though, to expect the children to respect you, your home, and your routine.



When you visit your grandchildren

Treat your family members at least as well as you would your friends. Remember that they have to live differently while you are there. Be considerate of their needs.

Plan your arrival and departure so that they cause minimal disruption to the household. Make sure it is a convenient time to visit for everyone involved.

If a visit means grandchildren may have to sleep on the floor or you may have to sleep on the couch, you may want to consider staying elsewhere if you can afford to do so.

While you are there

Give your grandchildren some time for themselves. Encourage them to participate in their regular activities and to pursue their own interests during your visit.

If your grandchildren are young and you haven't visited in a while, allow time to re-establish your relationship.

Treat your family relationships with care. Respect your children's right to make parenting decisions. At times you may disagree but it is generally best to withhold criticism or unsolicited advice.