

EXTENSION UPDATE

Release Date: Immediate

Author: Sarah Purcell, Extension Educator

Phone: 402-269-2301

Grandparenting: More than Cookies and Milk

Being a grandparent is one of the special joys of growing older. As one grandmother put it, “It’s like the dessert at the end of a good meal.”

Grandparents still supply cookies and warm hugs, but today’s grandparents fulfill other roles. Working mothers, divorce, and distance have changed grandparenting. Children need the stability, the time, and the caring of grandparents more than ever.

The majority of today’s families have both parents working outside the home. In the evenings and weekends, Mom and Dad are busy catching up on chores and errands.

Grandparents can offer children in these families time to be with adults who can give the children companionship and a listening ear.

Divorce has come to mean change and adjustment for more and more children. During the early months and years following a divorce, many children have strong feelings of sadness, loneliness, and anger.

The parents are typically so involved with their own feelings and changes they often do not have time and patience to deal effectively with their children’s feelings. Grandparents can be a special source of support and nurture for the grandchildren.

Many of today’s grandparents must deal with having their grandchildren live far away. Families need to find ways to stay in touch. Traditional methods include letters, phone calls, and

visits. Many families also have children spend a week or so with grandparents during summer vacation. Some families have several generations take vacations together.

Whatever ways you decide to keep in touch, the connection between the generations helps both the young and the old.

Listed below are the eight best gifts for your grandchildren:

1. Spend time one-on-one with grandchildren. The time grandparents spend individually with each grandchild is special. Time spent in activities appropriate to the child's age will build life-long memories.

2. Provide listening for the concerns as well as their joys. Having an adult who really listens helps build the self-esteem of a child or teen. Asking and really listening about school, projects, or concerns opens the door for the child to communicate.

3. Send special letters and notes just for them. Children love to get something in the mail all their own. Remember birthdays and holidays, but also send notes when nothing special is happening.

4. Offer companionship for activities they enjoy. Companionship is not just the special things you do for your grandchildren or the places you take them, but also the quiet times when you are together doing ordinary, everyday things. Let the child watch or join in as you bake, garden, or work in the shop.

5. Share your history and family traditions. It helps to give a child security and stability to know he or she belongs to a larger family with a special history.

6. Be a role model to show grandchildren that older people can be fun. Children are sometimes afraid of growing older. If children have a pleasant experience with elders who

approach life with excitement and good humor, they will have a more positive view of growing older.

7. Show grandchildren acceptance just as they are. One of the special things about grandparents is they usually do not have to deal with the everyday hassles parents experience. When the child is having trouble at school or home, a loving grandparent can let the child know, “I love you no matter what.”

8. The best gift of all is love. When you take time to be with and listen to each grandchild, your love will come through. Whether you are near or far, whether you see them often or seldom, children will know how special they are to you.

#####

Sarah Purcell is a Nebraska Extension Educator for Otoe County and Southeast Nebraska. She can be reached at 402-269-2301 or via email at spurcell2@unl.edu.