



## Family Wealth Institute

### Long Distance Grand-parenting

By

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The face of families in our modern society may be changing but one constant still remains....grandparents are very special people. The importance of a grandparent's involvement in a child's life cannot be overestimated. They play the role of historian, providing an historical, cultural and family sense of history. They mentor with their words of wisdom. They enhance the relationship with parents by providing stories and facts about parents, acting as confidants and providing an outlet when parent/teen relations become tense. Grandparents have the ability to give grandchildren the type of relaxed, quality time that was often not available to their own children when they were busily involved in career building or the stresses of full-time parenting. They now have the time to really listen, to teach, to play. It is often wistfully noted by parents that grandparents get to have all the fun time and when grandchildren get cross and cranky, they are returned to their parents.

The modern grandparent is no longer sitting quietly in a comfortable rocking chair. Many may still be working, playing an active volunteer and social role in the community or taking classes at the local university. They are able to play a physically more active role in the lives of their grandchildren.

But with the demographic changes now taking place, millions of American families are separated by distances that are too vast to make day-to-day grandparenting possible. Many grandparents want to know if the axiom "out of sight, out of mind" holds true. "Will living a long-distance away from a grandchild inevitably relegate grandparents to play only a token role in a grandchild's life?" Absolutely not. Even though it is not possible to be physically present on an ongoing basis, with thoughtfulness, creativity and mastery of modern technology, grandparents can still build meaningful relationships with their grandchildren. The primary principle is to maintain continuity and communication.

The following are some tips for effective long distance grand parenting:

- Become technologically savvy. Although the computer may seem very frightening for some grandparents, if a six-year-old can master the basics so can any grandparent. Computer training is available from your local adult education programs, computer stores or from one on one tutoring from individual specialists or the savvy teenager in



the neighborhood who can use the extra income. Email and instant messaging are the “stay in touch” language of your grandchildren and it only takes a minute. It will be well worth your time to master it.

If your grandchildren do not have a computer at home, get them a free e-mail account. They can then receive e-mail at their local public library. This can be done through Hotmail and Hotbot Mail. Remember that every contact is a reminder of caring and love and it helps bridge the distance. Additionally, you will be view by your grandchildren as a “cool cat”.

- Investigate setting up video camera installations in your home and the home(s) of your grandchildren so you can do videoconferencing. There are now relatively inexpensive units on the marketplace. You will then have visual contact as well as the ability to converse.
- Telephones are terrific. Call on a regular basis and when you are talking to your grandchildren keep a notepad handy so you can remind yourself of any items in the conversation with which you can follow up. For example, if your grandchild will be playing in a baseball game the following day, on the next call be sure to inquire about the outcome.
- The mail still works. Love notes and small tokens are great. Just a note with a piece of chewing gum is okay. Young children like the thought more than the content and it is exciting for them to get mail. Encourage your grandchild to send pictures, report cards, etc.
- Cameras and tape recorders are excellent ways to establish contact with your grandchildren. Your grandchild will treasure videotapes or audiotapes with you recording the family history, singing a song, or telling a story. Send pictures. Give your grandchild his/her own digital camera to take pictures for you. You can create a family website where these images can be posted for all family members to enjoy.
- Send postcards from every stop on a vacation describing the activities of the day.
- Be alert to any information you come across which relates to any of the interests of your grandchildren and be sure to send it to them.
- Send congratulatory cards (you can make them yourself) or send e-cards for accomplishments, large and small, e.g., losing her first tooth, making a speech at school, completing a project, etc.
- Send care packages of your famous cookies or other family goodies.



- Make every effort to be there for important events; graduations, religious passages, recitals, grandparent day at school and whatever events your family values highly.
- When you do have the opportunity to physically be together, be sure to spend one-on-one time with each grandchild during a part of each visit.
- Plan grandparent/grandchild weekends or trip together but be sure that your itinerary is “kid- friendly” by involving your grandchildren in the planning.

The power of the grandparent/grandchild relationship is movingly summarized in this quote from an unknown author ...

*“Grandparents hold our tiny hands for just a little while but our hearts forever.”*

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