

How Long-Distance Grandparents Can Still Stay Close

LINK: <https://www.liveabout.com/long-distance-grandparents-can-stay-close-1695765>

Not long ago, most grandparents lived in the same household with their children and grandchildren. Today thousands of miles may separate family members, complicating family relationships. Few grandparents are willing to move to be closer to their grandchildren, but they still find that being far from grandchildren is emotionally stressful. They also report that staying close to grandchildren is challenging but possible.

Long-distance grandparents must keep in mind that their child and his or her partner are portals to your grandchild. Although this is usually true, it is especially true with families that are geographically separated. With the cooperation of the parents, long-distance grandparents can utilize the following strategies to make the miles melt away.

Begin at the Beginning

If at all possible, arrange to be in the vicinity when your grandchild is born. Early bonding is important. At the same time, remember to respect the wishes of the parents. If you are not welcome in the delivery room, or if the new parents do not want visitors right away, accommodate their wishes without hard feelings. It takes time for beginning parents to figure out what is comfortable and what is not.

The more often you can physically be with your grandchild, the easier it will be to build a relationship. Perhaps your family members would like to contribute to a travel fund in lieu of other gifts for birthdays and other holidays.

Small children love to play with telephones, but they often freeze up when asked to talk on the phone. It helps if a time is set aside for phone calls when your grandchild is not too tired and not much else is going on. Using the speakerphone setting may also reduce the pressure on the child. Using other

age-appropriate strategies will make your phone calls with grandchildren more gratifying.

Use the Power of Photographs

Be sure to supply the parents with pictures of you, especially pictures of you with your grandchild if possible. Ask them to display the pictures where your grandchild can see them and show the pictures to your grandchild frequently.

Consider creating photo books that you can send to your grandchild. Many services are available to create photo books. In most, you create the book online, inserting digital photographs, and adding text. Your book is then submitted electronically to be published in soft or hardcover format. The finished books typically cost \$10-50, depending on size and format.

Another great spot for photographs is a family website where all members of the family can post snapshots and news. If you have a web designer in your family, he or she can create a family site, or you can create a group page on Facebook. By looking at the site frequently, your grandchild can get to know even those family members that he or she has never met.

If you don't have a digital camera and you can afford one, buy one. Digital photographs are a breeze to attach to an email and share in a million other ways. It's also really easy to post them to one of the various photo-sharing websites. Standard photographs can be used in the same ways, but the extra step of using a scanner is usually required.

Tap Into New Technology

Webcams can help keep families together. Even babies seem to take naturally to webcams, perhaps because most of them are already accustomed to television. Those with iPhones or iPads will enjoy using FaceTime. Others will need some type of video chat program or app. Skype is the most popular video calling software. Skype is easy to set up, and you can Skype with children of all ages.

As your grandchild grows, you will be able to keep in touch by email or texting. When your grandchild is old enough to use Facebook or other social networks, that is another way of connecting. You should, however, discuss this with your grandchild first. Some grandchildren are embarrassed to have their grandparents as "friends." Some will be amenable but may want to set

down some ground rules. If you are shocked by an occasional curse word or provocative pose, it might be best to stay away from the social networking sites altogether.

Don't Forget the Old Ways

Children of all ages still love getting things in the mail. Handwritten letters are the best. Don't worry about your handwriting; it's a part of your personality. If you are artistic, adding cartoons or sketches to your letters will be a big hit. If handwriting is a struggle for you, go ahead and word process your letters, but add a personal signature or note.

Greeting cards are also fun for kids to get. Kids of all ages love the ones that play music when they are opened. Vary your choices from humorous to sentimental. Handmade cards or cards made from a family photograph are also good choices.

A package is even more exciting for a child to get in the mail. Several small items are better than one large one. If one item misses the mark, something else will be a hit. Ask the parents to post the child's current enthusiasms or needs on the family website.

Something homemade makes a special gift. Grandparents who are gifted crafters have tons of choices, but the less talented can still make some cool gifts. If your children are established in a house, ask if you can plant a tree or shrub that can become "Nana's Tree" or "Grandpa's Tree."

Through these and other strategies, you should become a treasured part of your grandchild's life in spite of the miles between you.