



PRACTICAL WAYS TO CREATE MEANING

## Spoiling Grandkids: A Guide for Grandparents, Aunts and Uncles

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*Passing on family values and heritage, creating traditions and strengthening relationships can be important to all generations in families. Holidays, birthdays, weddings, graduations and family reunions*

*are just a few of the opportunities to reinforce concepts of stewardship – caring for the environment, our finances and our relationships.*

Grandparents, aunts, uncles and other extended family members love their grandkids, nieces and nephews. Showing love with intangibles creates strong relationships, pleasant memories *and* lasts longer than things, which may end up broken or forgotten.

Giving of ourselves is a way of strengthening the bonds of connection with family and friends. It is especially valuable between generations. Gift giving is meaningful when it comes from the heart and meets a physical, mental, spiritual, or emotional need of the receiver.

For your next gift-giving occasion to grandkids, nieces or nephews, consider these ideas:

**Gift of Talent/Skills** – We all need to feel like we contribute to our family and community. Children learn from watching their elders model these skills. Share [age-appropriate activities](#) (<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/just-time-parenting>) with your grandchild.

**Play together** - Teach a game from your childhood such as horseshoes, kick-the-can, pick-up sticks, or hide-and-seek. Ask them to teach you a game they know.

**Eat together** – Plant and tend a fruit, vegetable or edible flower garden with your grandchild. Prepare a [favorite recipe](#) (<http://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/wellness/>) together. Teach food preservation skills such as canning or dehydration.

**Work together** – Teach a hobby or work skill to your grandchild. It might be handiwork including needlework, quilting, painting or household repair. Ask the child to teach you something they know how to do.

**Gift of Words** – Words of affirmation are important to grandchildren who may hear more “Do this . . . Don’t do that. . .” at home and at school.

**Play** – Write/tell stories of your childhood memories. What was your favorite thing to do outdoors? Encourage the child by noticing special traits, abilities, interests and talents. Show the child that you enjoy his/her company.

**Eat** - Tell the food stories of your childhood. Did you grow your own food? What were holiday dinners like? What were your favorite foods? What did you dislike? What were the rules about food in your family? Encourage your grandchild by sharing what you appreciate about the child's choices of nourishment.

**Work** - Tell about your first job, your first big purchase, home, or other significant event in your life. Encourage grandchildren, nieces, and nephews by telling the positive values you see in them. Ask about their goals in life. Talk about how they can reach those goals. Point out the characteristics that you admire in them.

**Gift of Time** - Nothing says, "I love you," like full, undivided attention. Quality time also means sharing quality conversation and quality activities.

**Play together** – Do what the child enjoys. Set aside your adult expectations and enjoy imaginative play, silliness and fun! Pick a place outdoors to enjoy together. Depending on the youngster's age, you might read a book under a favorite tree, go for a hike, or go skiing or kayaking.

**Eat together** (<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/raising-healthy-kids>) – Children have higher self-esteem, choose less risky behaviors and are healthier when they eat with family members four or more meals a week. Schedule sit-down meals together as often as possible. Share the food preparation and conversation with your young ones. Be creative with picnics indoors and out.

**Work together** – Do household chores, school homework, car repair or volunteer in the community with your younger generation. Working together teaches skills, work ethic and the value of contributing to others.

**Gift of Objects** – We all like to receive objects that have been thoughtfully selected just for us. Keep in mind the child's age and abilities. Keep material gifts to a minimum and consider the [life-span](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXjk6nYMNIA) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXjk6nYMNIA>) of the object. If it will break or become obsolete soon or the child will lose interest in it quickly, don't waste your money on it. Her parents will have to store or give it away if it doesn't meet the child's needs.

**Play** -- Know the child and ask his parents what he needs for sports, music or hobbies. Play clothes or special equipment that supplement what his parents provide will be appreciated. Consumables like art materials are always needed. [Choose toys](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/pm1529m.pdf) (<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/pm1529m.pdf>) that stimulate critical thinking, imagination and are age-appropriate. Ask yourself, who is doing the thinking if I give this toy - the child or the manufacturer?

**Eat** -- Reinforce healthy choices for your grandchildren, nieces or nephews. Special treats are fun occasionally. Ask her parents what is appropriate.

**Work** -- Think about giving things that will help your grandchild with school. Get the back to school supply list and give a few of these items. Give practical items like clothes or diapers for infants. Do they need an activity or bus pass, or band instrument rental? Make something together by re-purposing items you have around the house. (Google “re-purposing and the item name,” such as “re-purposing chairs” for ideas.)

**Gift of Touch/Self Care** - Remember to wrap these gifts in plenty of hugs and kisses, bedtime backrubs, tickles and laughter. Practice [relaxation techniques](http://www.youtube.com/user/kcoop58) (<http://www.youtube.com/user/kcoop58> ) so you can be fully present for your grandchild. Then teach them to your adult children and grandkids!

YOU are the best gift your grandchild can receive!

## Resources:

Chapman, Gary, *The 5 Love Languages*. Northfield Publishing, 2009.

*Child Nutrition*, retrieved September 16, 2013 at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/families/child-nutrition-families> and <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/raising-healthy-kids>.

Cooper, Kristi. *Mind Body Skills for Self Care* videos, retrieved September 16, 2013 at <http://www.youtube.com/user/kcoop58>.

*Eco Family Pinterest* retrieved at <http://pinterest.com/issuecofamily/>.

*Just-In-Time Parenting*, retrieved September 16, 2013 at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/families/just-time-parenting>.

*Loop Scoops* videos, Public Broadcasting System Kids, retrieved September 16, 2013 at <http://pbskids.org/loopscoops/> .

*Money Tips* blog, retrieved September 16, 2013 at <http://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/moneytips/>.

*Sports nutrition* retrieved September 16, 2013 at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/node/1218> .

*Understanding Children*, retrieved September 16, 2013 at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/pm1529m.pdf>.

*Words on Wellness* blog, retrieved September 16, 2013 at <http://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/wellness/>.

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