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Long-distance grandparenting: Toddlers and kids



If you are like 68% of grandparents, you live too far away for regular interactions with your grandchildren. No reading bedtime stories or soothing little tears. No ticklefests or hands-on projects. These casual yet meaningful activities just aren't an option. Video visiting helps. But according to Kerry Byrne of *The Long-Distance Grandparent*, you can count on only about a minute of video engagement for every year of your grandchild's age.

Here are some tips for building an online relationship:

- **Coordinate with the parents.** Can you make life easier for them? Try reading stories over Zoom while the kids eat breakfast and the parents pack lunches.
- **Plan for topics or activities.** Find out from the parents what's of interest lately. Are dinosaurs a hit these days? Send dino stickers. Roar together and pretend to be T Rex.
- **Be SILLY.** Don't be afraid to make funny faces or do the unexpected. Remember, if you were with them in person, you'd likely be more of your playful self. Express that online: Three jumping jacks and run around the chair when they guess the correct answer in a riddle.
- **Enhance your visits with props.** Send them something in the mail that they can do with you the next time you video call. A tambourine. Heart-shaped Valentine's glasses. Or popcorn you can "share." (Who can catch the most popcorns with their mouth?)
- **Use photos and video.** Send photos of you doing silly things. Make a video of a children's activity song, like the hokey-pokey. Ask your grandchildren to sing and dance with you. Put it on YouTube so the parents can play it whenever they need a break.

Interactive apps that might be of interest. The "Longevity Explorers," a grassroots group of tech-savvy seniors, recommends these apps for their high interactivity. The parents will need to download a version too in order for these to work.

- **Readeo.** (ages 2–5) With the BookChat feature, a video of each of you appears side by side above an e-book. You can read, point to images on the page, and you or your grandchild can "turn" the page.
- **Caribu.** (ages 4–12) This app has a library of e-books, plus puzzles and games, mazes, and sharable "paint and draw" activities.
- **Playingcards.io.** (age 8+) A virtual shared "tabletop" allows you to play games such as Hearts, Go Fish, and Crazy 8s. Or rummy and canasta for older kids. There are board games too, such as checkers and chess, backgammon, and cribbage.

Do you live far from your family?

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