

GRANDPARENTS... THE VITAL CONNECTION

INTRODUCTION:

It is no secret that throughout the history of mankind, **grandparents** have been the key to family stability, harmony and continuity. They have been the long term repositories of information and history, the sources of wisdom and experience which contribute to the basic physical survival of various cultures, the teachers, historians and nurturers, and parental consultants, encouragers and supporters throughout the ages.

Ironically, we live in a time and a society in which grandparents are barely even acknowledged as family – the legal system does not recognize grandparents as “real family” and provides no rights to them (or any other non-parental family); today’s nuclear family has been truncated to include only dad/mom/kids. Old age is not even valued in our society. The idyllic Norman Rockwell portrayal of the whole family gathered around grandma and grandpa’s Thanksgiving table filled with smiles, happiness and unity is hardly common today. So what has happened? What has gone wrong? Arthur Kornhaber suggest these likely possibilities...

1. The soaring divorce rate in our nation
2. The mobility of the middle generation leaving the family home for “better” opportunities
3. The abandonment of the elder generation to retirement in the sunbelt or continuing in the workplace.

So what do the children think? For them, Grandpa and Grandma are NOT out of the picture. In fact, they are, according to Weekly Reader survey, still the first choice among children for family vacation options. It is true – the love between grandparents and grandchild has the capacity to illuminate and transform people and bring meaning into life. This explains the deep joy each experiences when this “vital connection” is fulfilled, and the profound pain when it is severed.

So what can we do to overcome the tremendous obstacles which face us as grandparents, and innovatively reconnect our families and give them a brighter future? The answer lies in understanding who we are and the tremendous gifts which God has provided for us to pass on.

Here are EIGHT ways we can present these “gifts” to our grandchildren (adapted from Dr. Arthur Kornhaber’s “Grandparent Power!”)...

1. **LIVING HISTORIAN:**
Providing a connection to the past history of the family through oral and written communication of events and family histories known only to them. Such histories also provide identity and a sense of belonging to members of the family.
2. **HERO/ROLE MODEL :**
Grandparents can play a strategic role as “heroes” in the lives of their grandchildren. They are “elders” to whom most grandchildren look for wisdom and a sense of security. Grandparents can be important role models to grandchildren, whether or not they have strong, secure family relationships with their own parents.
3. **TEACHER:**
Because of the unique relationship grandparents have with their grandchildren, they have a strategic opportunity to teach “life” and reinforce family values. Grandparents often have teachable moments not even parents have to impress our children with understanding of the world around us and the things God is doing.
4. **MENTOR:**
A mentor is one who communicates value and belief in another to be all that God has created them to be. Mentor walk alongside, not only as counselors and teachers, but to do life together and allow them to learn from our own experiences, while building their own.
5. **STUDENT:**
Grandparents must always be learning and growing themselves if they are going to be seen as authentic and wise. Grandparents are students of their own world and their grandchildren, always watching and learning from them, seeking to understand how they are made and the bent God has given them towards purposeful living.
6. **NURTURER:**
Grandparents have a unique opportunity to provide resources and emotional support that may not always be available otherwise. Words of encouragement, along with the giving of time and other resources can help our grandchildren feel loved and valued.
7. **WONDER WIZARD:**
Grandchildren often look at grandparents with a sense of awe. Little things we do like crafts or baking or woodworking can create an enormous sense wonder and amazement. Grandparents can take advantage of these to help their grandchildren develop imagination and wonder at the world around them, and to help them develop special hobbies or skills that connect them with a world of imagination and wonder.
8. **BLESSER:**
Our children and grandchildren need our blessing – the communication of high value and a special future, along with our commitment to believe in them and stand with them in the journey ahead. Written and/or spoken words of blessing will have enormous power in shaping their lives and giving them confidence to reach high and dream big.

As a grandparent you have a unique opportunity to play a major role in the spiritual development of your grandchildren. You are in a unique position to connect with them at the soul level and help them understand such things as giving, loving, honesty, community, commitment, respect, honor, and reverence to name a few. The exodus of many grandparents to warmer climates and retirement communities means too many families are missing important stabilizing elements which only the older generation can provide. Don't abdicate your position as resident elder by a self-imposed exile. Ask God to give you a renewed vision and vigor for assuming this rightful and vital connection with your grandchildren. You could be the most significant influence in their lives at a moment when it is most needed.

***“O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter hidden things, things from of old –
what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.
We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,
His power, and the wonders He has done!” Ps. 78:1-4***