



Grandparents Raising Grandchildren:



Fun Learning Activities for You and Your Grandchildren

Have you ever heard, “I’m bored!” from your grandchildren? What can you do to keep them entertained and learning at the same time? Watching television and playing video games is an easy distraction, but not the best solution for boredom. What they may want more than anything else is time with you. And there are plenty of things to do that are entertaining, teach important skills, and give you and your grandchildren a chance to spend some fun time together.

When you spend time interacting with your grandchildren, you do more than just take care of boredom. If you are actively involved in their learning at home, your grandchildren are more likely to become successful learners both in and out of school. The earlier you begin working with your grandchildren, the more responsive they will be to learning.

The Importance of Play

Be sure to include plenty of time for free play in your grandchildren’s lives. Young children learn best through play. Adults tend to think of play as unimportant, but it’s actually one of the best ways for children to explore and experience new things. Here are just a few of the skills that children can learn through play:

- Figuring out how things work and solving problems
- Comparing and contrasting different objects
- Learning to understand and use language
- Building muscle strength and coordination
- Practicing control of their bodies

- Developing imagination and expressing creativity
- Learning about themselves, others, and the world
- Expressing their feelings in healthy ways
- Increasing their ability to concentrate

Children use a combination of skills and abilities during play. Children building with blocks can learn to plan, develop coordination and balance, use language to describe what they are building, and cooperate with their siblings and friends.

Simple Toys for Young Children

With the help of toy stores, toys for children have become very expensive. But play doesn’t have to be expensive to be a good learning experience. Some of the best toys can be bought at yard sales or made from objects around the house. Here are some great toys and activities for children:

- ***Homemade play dough or finger paint*** can be made from simple ingredients such as flour, salt, cornstarch, and water. (See the “Recipes for Fun” section for some easy recipes.)
- ***Old clothes, shoes, purses, and scarves are ideal for playing dress-up.*** Use old clothes from your closet, or buy fancy party clothes very cheaply at thrift stores.
- ***Crayons or washable markers*** and paper encourage budding artistic skills. If you encourage children to draw on the backs of

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junk mail and other paper, you will also teach them to protect the environment.

• **Musical instruments** can be made at home very easily. Oatmeal boxes and empty plastic containers with lids make great drums. Bells can be purchased at a craft store and strung on a string. Make shakers and rattles by putting dry beans or rice in a sealed container or between two sealed paper plates.



• **Blocks** help children practice their building skills. Wooden blocks can be made by sawing old wood scraps into small pieces and sanding them smooth. Empty milk cartons and cereal boxes also make good blocks.

• **Puppets** can be made from old socks. Encourage your grandchildren to help decorate the puppets with markers, buttons, sequins, pieces of fabric, or any other scraps you have around the house.

Recipes for Fun

Play dough and finger paint are great materials for encouraging creativity. Rather than buying commercial play dough, why not make your own at home? It's cheaper, and children get to practice skills such as measuring and mixing. Here are a few fun recipes to try with your grandchildren.

Basic Playdough

Ingredients: 2½ cups flour, ½ cup salt, 1 tablespoon alum, 3 tablespoons cooking oil, 1½ cups HOT water

Directions: Combine oil and water. Mix dry ingredients together. Pour liquid into dry ingredients. Mix thoroughly. Knead until soft. Stores well in a zipper bag or an airtight container.

“Goop”

Ingredients: 1 box cornstarch, water

Directions: Add enough water to a box of cornstarch to make a thick paste. The mixture should be “scoopable” with hands or fingers. When a lump of it is squeezed, it melts, then becomes more solid again. Add more water if the mixture dries out. Does not store well.

Cornstarch Finger Paint

Ingredients: ½ cup cornstarch, 4 cups boiling water, cold water, food coloring, glycerine (optional)

Directions: Dissolve cornstarch in a small amount of cold water. Gradually add boiling water. Stir constantly. Cook until mixture is clear and thick. Glycerine can be added to remove stickiness and provide a smooth texture. Add food coloring. Cool before using.

Detergent Finger Paint

Ingredients: liquid dishwashing detergent, water, food coloring

Directions: Add water slowly to detergent until you get a pasty mixture. Add food coloring. Very easy to clean up.

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• **Bean bags** are a safe and inexpensive way for children to practice throwing skills. You can make beanbags from just about any old clothes or fabric scraps. If you don't have fabric around the house, you can buy small pieces very cheaply in the remnants section of a fabric or craft store.

Learning Activities for Children

Looking for more fun activities to share with your grandchildren? Most children are eager learners, and are excited to try new activities. They tend to be interested in everything around them, which makes finding new games easy. Here are some fun and easy activities that you can do with your grandchildren. After your grandchildren learn these activities well, try varying them to add more excitement.

Preschool - Grade 3

• **Sorting and stacking:** Teach pre-math skills by encouraging children to classify as they set the table. Help them match and stack plates of similar sizes and shapes. Have them sort flatware, placing forks with forks and spoons with spoons. You might also teach your grandchildren how to make a "restaurant style" place setting at the table with two forks to the left of the plate and butter knife, spoon, and glass to the right.

• **Hidden letters:** Build letter recognition by encouraging children to be "letter detectives" around the house. Send them to find specific letters of the alphabet (e.g., five A's or three C's) anywhere in the house. Help them check out the letters on cereal boxes, soup cans, magazines, newspapers, game boxes, and other objects. Start with easy-to-find letters, and build up to harder ones. This game also works well in the car, using letters on signs and billboards.

• **Weigh me:** Teach estimating skills by asking your grandchildren to guess the weight of household objects—such as a wastebasket, a coat, or a full glass of water. Use a scale to check their guesses.

• **What does it take to grow?:** Teach cause-and-effect relationships with two similar, healthy plants. Have your grandchildren water one plant every other day and ignore the other. Keep both plants in the same area so they get the same amount of light. Ask your grandchildren to predict what will happen, and see if they are right after several weeks.

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Grades 4 - 5

• **Street smarts:** Gather maps and schedules to a special place in your area, such as a zoo, a museum, or a sporting event. Let your grandchildren plan a trip for the family. Ask them to figure out how long it will take to get there, how much it will cost, and when is the best time to make the trip. This activity challenges children to use their reading and problem-solving skills in a practical situation. If the children have internet access, they may be able to find more information for the trip on the Web.

• **TV and the world:** Help your grandchildren track the world events they hear about on TV news. Post a world map next to the TV set. Watch the news with your grandchildren, and have them mark world news spots on the map with colored thumbtacks or stickers. Keep reference books such as dictionaries and the world almanac close by. Encourage children to look up answers to their questions when their curiosity is high.

• **On the move:** Sharpen math skills on trips. At the gas station, ask your children to estimate

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how much gas you need and the cost per gallon. When on the road, have them help you find the gas station with the lowest price. On the highway, ask your grandchildren to read the signs and check the different speed limits. Have your grandchildren estimate distances between cities and check the estimates on a road atlas.

• **Picture stories:** Encourage children's imagination and creativity. Have them choose four or five pictures from magazines and newspapers, and put them together to tell a story. Ask your grandchildren to number the pictures one, two, three, etc. Have them tell the story with the pictures in numerical order. For variety, rearrange the pictures, and encourage your grandchildren to tell a new story about the rearrangement.

Grades 6 - 8

• **Let your voice be heard:** Promote good citizenship by helping your grandchildren write letters to the editors of local newspapers about an issue that affects them. They might want to suggest that a bike path be built near the school or that a city event be planned for youngsters. Children are citizens, and their ideas are worth hearing. Look for essay or drawing contests in local newspapers that your grandchildren could enter.

• **Read all about it:** Introduce your grandchildren to the many kinds of information in the daily newspaper. Ask them to find the pages containing news about government leaders, editors' opinions, weather reports, car sales, movie listings, house and apartment rentals, and want ads. Discuss who they think might need each type of information. Discuss special

topics they read in the newspaper, such as presidential elections or world affairs.

• **How much does it cost?:** Put math skills to work. Help your grandchildren understand living costs by discussing household expenses with them. Make a list of monthly bills. Fold the paper to hide the costs and have your grandchildren guess the cost of each item. Check the estimates with the actual costs. Help them learn how to prepare a budget, set up and add to a savings account, and compare costs when shopping.

• **Nice words:** Encourage your grandchildren's vocabulary and social skills. Write each family member's name on a separate sheet of paper. Put the sheets in a folder or drawer, and have each member of the family write kind words to describe that person. Encourage your grandchildren to use a dictionary or thesaurus to come up with unique words. Place the notes where family members can find them...and watch the smiles!

Activities Outside your Home

Sometimes you and your grandchildren need a break from the routine of being at home. Check out the activities offered in your community. You may be surprised at the variety of fun activities available that are free or low-cost. Here are some examples:

• **Community Classes:** Swimming, art, music, golf, tennis and karate are just a few of the many programs offered in many communities. Check your local park or recreation center, your grandchildren's school, or the local arts center for ideas. Libraries often have special programs at low or no cost for children of all ages.



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• **Recreational activities:** Local parks departments may sponsor organized sports activities. Soccer, baseball, basketball, and volleyball are just a few sports that often have “youth leagues.” Ask your local religious organization or parks and recreation department for sign-up information, or ask other parents for their ideas.

• **Arts and entertainment:** Local arts councils often sponsor plays, concerts, and “arts in the park” activities to promote cultural awareness. Watch the calendar in your local newspaper for announcements.

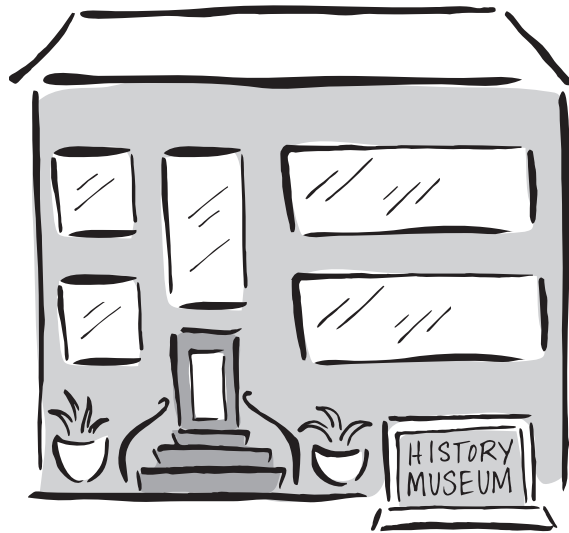
• **Tourism promotions:** Many state parks and other tourist attractions offer free entertainment and activities during tourist seasons. Contact your local tourism commission to find out what activities are available in your area and a schedule of season highlights.

• **Historical attractions:** Check out the history of your area. Often there are tours, festivals, and programs celebrating historical events.

The local newspaper and the tourism commission should have listings of these activities.

• **Camps:** Summer camps are a great way for your grandchildren to make new friends and develop their talents. Both day camps and overnight camps are available in most areas. When choosing a camp, find one that fits your grandchildren’s interests. Some camps are geared toward specific skills and talents, such as music or sports. Other

camps offer a wide variety of activities. Schools, religious organizations, 4-H, the YMCA, and other civic organizations often have camping opportunities available. (For more information on selecting a camp, visit the American Camping Association web site at www.acacamps.org)



In Summary

There are many different opportunities to keep you and your grandchildren busy and learning all year round. Carve out time to do fun activities together. Remember that fun doesn’t have to be expensive—spending time together is the best thing you can do for your grandchildren.

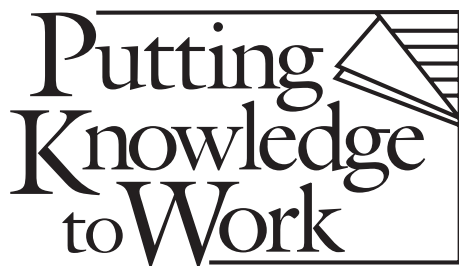
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