



Choosing Gifts *for* Grandchildren

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Grandparents give gifts for many different reasons and in many different ways. Some want to honor special occasions and accomplishments with things of value. Some want to encourage their grandchildren to have fun. Others choose gifts that help grandchildren learn about their family or cultural history. Some are satisfied to buy toys—or to buy nothing at all. It's up to you how you want to use gifts in your relationships with your grandchildren.

Appropriate and meaningful gift selection requires learning something about your grandchildren. There are many ways to make gifts special and to use gift giving as a strategy for building connections across the generations. Here are some things to consider when selecting gifts.

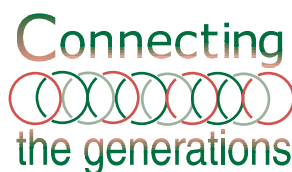
Basic rules of gift selection

Your love and affection are the most precious gifts you can offer your grandchild. Some gifts must be bought, others involve your time and attention. Spending time together and doing things together are gifts that provide opportunities to build and maintain relationships.

Check with your grandchildren's parents about the suitability of any gift you are considering.

Consider the specific things your grandchild would enjoy. Thoughtful selections let your grandchildren know you are aware of their interests and sensitive to their needs.

Find out the types of books, cassette tapes, compact disks, computer software, or toys appropriate at your grandchild's age. Helpful sources of information are your grandchildren themselves, their parents, a children's librarian, or the children's book buyer at your local bookstore.



If you prefer to purchase toys, consider those that will have the greatest play value over the longest time. Try to select items that will not be tossed aside after one use. For example, large cardboard blocks that can be used to build castles and cities will

be enjoyed again and again.

Create a gift-giving strategy. Add to a grandchild's collection of marbles, rocks, or seashells. Develop a theme for your gifts, such as outdoor things or rainy-day activities. Help your grandchild develop a hobby, such as fishing, bird watching, sewing, gardening, stargazing, or cake decorating.

It's not what you give but how you give it

Small, inexpensive gifts can be as meaningful as expensive gifts. It's the love behind the gift that's important. Watch for sales and buy in advance so you'll have a ready supply of small gifts when needed.

Use your imagination. Wrap birthday presents in the Sunday comics or decorate a box of cookies with stickers.

Make a photo album of their parent (your child) for each grandchild.

If you have a special artistic talent, give your art as a gift: a crocheted sweater, a painting, a hand-carved paperweight.

Give a handmade gift certificate of an activity you and your grandchild can do together. This might involve a hobby you'll share, a game you will play together, a fishing trip, a shared cross-stitch project, a trip to the zoo, a visit to a children's museum, or tickets to a children's play.

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Gifts for no reason at all are often the nicest

Little gifts that let your grandchildren know you're thinking of them will keep you close throughout the year. These unexpected gifts may be appreciated most of all. Here are some ideas.

Do something unexpected. Send telegrams, seeds, or a pressed flower from your garden; send \$1 in a card; give a homemade gift; send poetry that you wrote. These gifts will remind grandchildren that you care.

Send something you know the grandchild would enjoy: a crossword puzzle, food made from a special recipe, something cut from a magazine, stickers, colorful socks, seashells, a needlework project. Younger children especially enjoy picture postcards. Children love getting photos of themselves, too, especially if the photo shows them doing "crazy" things.

Young children love make-believe and dress-up. Send a box of old dresses and shirts, hats, ties, and shoes. Send a clown outfit and a book or tape about magic tricks.

Give grandchildren the gift of a reminder that they are special to you. Hang their drawings on the wall or place them in a photo album.

Send gifts that build connections: a picture book of your life or of a special outing; a story about what it was like when you were their age (don't forget to ask them what it's like for them now); your framed photo to be kept in a special place; decorations

or family keepsakes, such as crafts you have made together or family heirlooms; food that has been shared in your family for generations, and a promise to teach your grandchild the recipe. All these help you to share your heritage with your grandchildren.

Audiotapes or videotapes

Letters can be read and reread, and tapes can be listened to or watched over and over. Children may be able to return tapes to you with messages of their own. Suggest that parents interview younger grandchildren on a tape. Children may also dictate a letter on tape or get a parent to help write one.

Tell the tale of your life with video footage of the house you grew up in, where you went to school, places you played, and so on. This video will become part of your family's history.

Read a story to your grandchild and record it on a cassette tape. Send the book and the cassette tape to your grandchildren. They will hear your voice and will feel close to you. This is a gift they can enjoy over and over again, and it can be helpful to parents, too, when they don't have time to read to their children.

Send a "Living Birthday Card."

With the help of a camcorder, create a make-believe birthday party complete with hats, balloons, and a cake. Have fun, sing songs, tell a story. Along with the tape, send a birthday box with hats, balloons, and noisemakers. You can do this yourself or invite others to do it with you. Show them you are happy to celebrate their special day.

