

Discussion Guide
Connect with Your Grandkids: Fun Ways to Bridge the Miles

by Cheri Fuller

We hope you'll download and print out the following discussion guide that accompanies the new Focus on the Family/Tyndale book Connect with Your Grandkids. Then gather some grandparents you know to meet weekly over coffee or a brown bag lunch. As you read a chapter of the book each week, use the questions below to stimulate conversation and discussion on that topic. Share ideas, encourage each other, and together enjoy the journey of grandparenting.

Chapter 1: The Joy of Connecting with Our Grandchildren

1. What are some differences in culture, family makeup, and your generation of adults that affect the role of grandparents today or may have brought changes to the way you grandparent?

2. What are the challenges of long-distance grandparenting?

3. In this chapter, there are examples of different kinds of grandparents—the Reading Grandma, the Outdoor Grandparent, the Power-Visit Grandma, etc. Given your station in life, your job or retirement, your family dynamics and interests—what kind of grandparent are you or do you want to be?

4. Who or what defines you as a grandparent—your grown kids and their expectations, your spouse, God, the way your own grandparents were, or your own perspective?

5. Someone once said that two of the most satisfying experiences in life are those of being a grandparent and being a grandchild. What is your favorite aspect of being a grandparent?

What do you want your relationship with your grandkids to be like in five years? Ten to fifteen years or beyond?

Chapter 2: Sharing Your Interests and Theirs

1. Grandparents have the opportunity to pass on interests or skills when they share them with their grandchildren. What do you enjoy doing that you'd like to share with your grandkids or are already sharing with them?
2. In your experience, why does sharing interests and doing activities together help you form a bond with your grandkids? For example, think about how quilting with a friend, volunteering together for a cause you both believe in, or walking together builds relationships. How can sharing interests in this way positively affect your grandparent-grandchild connection?
3. What skills or knowledge did your grandparents pass on to you by involving you or teaching you?
4. What is an interest one of your grandchildren has at this stage of his or her life that you could use to build your connection?
5. Is there something you've always wanted to do that you could learn or pursue with a grandchild? What would it take to do this together?

Chapter 3: Just-for-Fun Stuff to Do with Grandkids

1. What is the most enjoyable activity you've ever done with a grandchild—or that your grandparents did with you?
2. What one or two “Just-for-Fun” ideas in this chapter would you like to try?
3. What's fun for kids changes as they grow. Jot down and discuss what a few of your grandkids consider fun.
4. How can you adapt an activity to include their developmental stages when two or three grandchildren of different ages are together?

Chapter 4: Grand Sleepovers

1. In what ways are you making your home a welcoming place for your grandkids when they come for a sleepover or just to spend time with you? See the tips on pages 44 and 45. Drawing from your experience, what ideas would you give a new grandparent?
2. Which of the ideas for sleepovers did you find most interesting or get inspired to try?
3. What are the pros and cons of having a sleepover with several grandkids on the same night versus inviting one at a time? Which will work better for the ages of your grandchildren and your current energy level and schedule?

4. What was memorable about sleeping over at your own grandparents' (or aunt's or uncle's) home when you were young?

Chapter 5: Connecting Your Grandkids through Cousin Camps

1. When you have all the grandkids together for several days of "Cousin Camp," what benefits and gifts are you giving them? (Read aloud Jaclyn's comment on page 49 and Wesley's on page 55.)
2. Having the funds for Cousin Camp can be challenging for some of us. One Grandma I know has a garage sale each spring and has all the parents in the family bring items to sell—all to raise funds for the grandkids' week together. Another had all the daughters and daughters-in-law provide the evening meals (in frozen kid-friendly casseroles) to help with the cost of feeding the kids. How could you raise or set aside some additional funds for your gathering?
3. Cousin Camp is not about fancy activities or places, but about doing things together that make good memories. What is an example of this concept in the chapter?
4. There are some terrific tips in chapter 5 from veteran grandparents who've had Cousin Camps. Which ones could you apply to help plan a camp or family gathering where all the grandchildren are present? Jot them down and share them with the group.
5. How can you involve and engage teenagers in a Cousin Camp?

Chapter 6: Traveling with Your Grandkids

1. A number of stories shared in this chapter are about “grand travel,” as travel agents refer to it. Which of the stories inspired you the most? What ideas did it give you?
2. What places would be on your wish list to take your grandchildren to?
3. What type of travel discussed in this chapter would fit best in your lifestyle and budget (for example, Elderhostel weeks, camping or cabins at national parks, overnight at a hotel)?
4. What suggestions for traveling with children could you apply to future travel adventures with your grandkids?
5. How can taking a teenage grandson or granddaughter on a trip build your relationship with him or her? If you have teen grandkids, where would *they* want to go?

Chapter 7: Visiting—at Your House and Theirs

1. Are you comfortable with having in-town grandchildren drop by without scheduling ahead of time? What guidelines, experiences, or thoughts do you have regarding this?
2. Reread the section “Grandma’s House” on pages 82–83. What key elements made this home the grandkids’ favorite place?

3. As discussed in this chapter, some grandparents keep ice cream in the freezer labeled with each grandchild's name, a special shelf for their toys, or toothbrushes with their names on them for sleepovers. How do you help your grandchildren feel at home at your house?
4. What key things do your daughters and/or daughters-in-law want you to observe or remember to do—or not do—when you visit in their homes? Share an experience where you learned by trial and error what *not to do*.

Chapter 8: You've Got Mail: Connecting through Letters and Cards

1. Though Internet connection is great (and we cover that in chapter 9), what are the advantages of a real letter that comes in the mail to a grandchild or grandteen? Reread the sidebar quote on page 93.
2. This chapter shares a number of things kids loved receiving from their grandparents, as in the sidebar on page 96 or Joyce's *Guideposts* cards described on page 95. What does your grandchild most like to receive via UPS or in the mail? What item has been the biggest hit?
3. If writing letters is not your cup of tea, what other ways could you connect with long-distance grandkids via the U.S. postal service? What is another way to let them know you're thinking about them?
4. What creative ideas did you discover here that *don't take much time* but put a smile on grandkids' faces? Pick one of these to do in the next month.

Chapter 9: Connecting Via the Internet and Technology

1. How much do your grandchildren use technology such as e-mail, cell phones, Facebook, Twitter, etc.?
2. If connecting with your grandkids through technology is an area you feel uncomfortable with or unprepared for, what computer course could you take at a local library or community college, or which grandteen could teach you some tips for e-mailing or texting?
3. I've found that if your grandkids are between the ages of 7 and 18 (or even younger than 7), they are probably on the computer and Internet sometime during the day. Based on the ideas in this chapter, how could you join them and stay connected in this techy way?
4. There are some inspiring stories in this chapter about connecting with long-distance grandkids via a webcam with software like Skype. If you have webcammed with your grandchild, share what happened. What ideas did you gain about staying in touch through webcam?
5. What's the most effective way you've discovered to connect with your grandkids over the Internet, cell phone, or other technology?

Chapter 10: Connecting through Photos and Memory Albums

1. I have friends who make photo albums on shutterfly.com and others who do Creative Memories scrapbooks for their grandkids. Discuss in your group ways you've used photos or made albums.

2. As I share in this chapter, if you live a distance away from grandkids, a little album of pictures helps them remember you and the fun things you did together. What other ways does a memory album, no matter how simple, help the grandchild stay connected across the miles with grandparents?

3. Not all of us are crafty or are expert photographers, yet this chapter gives a number of easy ideas for connecting with grandchildren through photos and scrapbooks. Which ones sound most doable for you to implement?

4. On page 122 is the saying, “No cowboy was ever faster on the draw than a grandparent pulling a baby picture out of a wallet.” How do you display or carry your grandchildren’s pictures?

Chapter 11: Connecting through Arts and Crafts

1. What is the value or benefit of a child doing arts or crafts, creating something, or doing woodworking at his or her grandparents’ home?

2. Which of the art supplies suggested in this chapter could you have on hand, gathered in one accessible place?

3. Grandma Kathy Carlson’s approach to doing craft projects with her grandchildren has some real wisdom in it. What can we learn from her about dealing with mistakes? See page 131.

4. What place in your home would work best for grandkids to create, paint, or draw?

Chapter 12: Someone's in the Kitchen with Grandma

1. What experiences did you have, if any, of cooking or being in the kitchen with your grandmother?
2. How do food and family meal traditions bridge the generation gap? What family favorites from the past generation have you shared with your grandkids and their parents?
3. My grandsons Noah and Luke love for me to make nachos when they come over to "Nandy's Café" as they call my kitchen, and in the winter the other grandkids love roasting marshmallows in our fireplace. What are your grandchildren's favorite treats or recipes you make with or for them? It can be simple, but if it's a food Grandma makes, it's special.
4. Which recipe(s) in this chapter do you plan to make the next time you're with your grandchildren? How can you involve them in cooking and preparing food?

Chapter 13: Connecting through Storytelling

1. What do children gain when we *tell* rather than *read* a story to them?

2. In this chapter I describe storytelling experiences like the Davy Crockett tales I make up to share with my grandboys when they spend the night. What is a story you remember your grandparents telling you or one you shared with your own kids when it was lights-out time?

3. If your grandchildren live far away from you, a terrific connector is a CD recording in your voice of several of their favorite children's books and stories. If you made a CD, what would you include?

4. I love what Archie Dunham said: "Grandparents are living links to the past, even as they encourage their grandchildren to dream of the future" (page 163). What are several stories from your family's history you would want to pass along so they are not forgotten? See the tips for "priming the pump" on page 166 to help you get started.

5. How can enlivening Bible stories by sharing them in the context of storytelling be a gift to our grandkids? Let me encourage you to rehearse a new story you've never shared before, whether it's a Bible story, fantasy or family/personal experience story, and next time you're together, give it a whirl! They'll love hearing your story.

Chapter 14: Encouraging Your Grandchildren's Reading

1. What does this chapter say about the best ways to help raise a lifelong reader? (The last paragraphs of page 170 are worth pondering.)

2. What subjects or themes do your grandchildren enjoy? If you have a bunch, pick one or two grandchildren.

3. How have you encouraged your grandchildren's reading?
4. Reread the ideas on pages 171–174 and 175–177. Which one of these do you plan to apply, depending on your grandkids' ages?

Chapter 15: Being a Spiritual Influence in Your Grandkids' Lives

1. Frequently the major spiritual influence and intercessor in a child's life is a grandparent. Which of your grandparents or great-grandparents influenced you the most in this area?
2. How did he or she influence you? What is the long-lasting effect of his or her prayers, faith, or example?
3. What creative idea or inspiration did you gain in this chapter to help you be a positive spiritual influence in your grandkids' lives?
4. There is no more powerful spiritual influence in a child's life than the example of the adults in his or her family—especially parents and grandparents. What values and qualities do you hope to be modeling by living them before your grandkids when you're with them?

Chapter 16: Connecting Heart to Heart: Praying for Your Grandkids

1. Considering the truth that our prayers outlive us and go on to bless our children, grandchildren, and future generations, is there an older family member who prayed or prays for you and your kids/grandkids? How have you seen God work through his or her prayers?
2. Reread Dr. Tim and Darcy Kimmel's reflection on the value of praying for grandchildren (page 198) and share about an answered prayer you prayed for a grandchild.
3. Knowing that Grandma and Grandpa are praying is a blessing to children, especially when they go through difficult times. How can you (or have you) let your grandkids know you're praying for them on an ongoing basis?
4. Which friends or fellow grandparents could you join for a once-a-week prayer group? Which could be prayer partners who pray on the phone regularly for your combined grandchildren? How can you implement this? Check out momsintouch.org for "Grandmas In Touch" group materials.

Chapter 17: The Best Gifts of All

1. Do you have a favorite quote about grandparenting? Whether it's one of the quotes from this book or from another source, share it with your group.
2. What do you love most about being a grandparent? What gifts, tangible or intangible, have your grandchildren blessed you with?

3. What challenges or problems have you or someone you know experienced in giving gifts to grandchildren at holidays or birthdays? What solutions have worked for you?

4. If you have developed a gift-giving tradition with your grandchildren, what is it? How has it blessed your grandkids? How have they responded?

Rudy Giuliani once said, "What children need most are the essentials that grandparents provide in abundance. They give unconditional love, kindness, patience, humor, comfort, lessons in life. And most importantly, cookies." Those are gifts we can all purpose to give our grandkids. May you be blessed and encouraged as you continue on the wonderful journey of grandparenting!