

The Grandparent Guide: Making the Most of Everyday Moments



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

by Sarah MacLaughlin

As a grandparent, you play a huge role in raising the next generation. While [a few things have changed since you were a parent](#), many caregiving basics remain the same—such as the value of talking, reading, and playing together. These everyday interactions strengthen your bond and help your grandchild build strong brain connections that get them ready for school and life.

Stop, Look, and Listen

Being a grandparent allows you to rediscover the wonder of the world through the eyes of your grandchild. A parade of ants on the sidewalk, a puddle to splash in, a bird chirping overhead—all are worth investigating. Many grandparents tell us they often felt rushed when they had their own children. Grandparenting provides a second chance to slow down and take it all in. Here are some ideas for supporting your grandchild's early learning through these everyday moments:

- When you are together, talk about what you're seeing and doing. (This is helpful even before children seem old enough to understand.)
- Name new things in the environment: "Stop sign, traffic light, crosswalk." "Robin, pigeon, squirrel!"
- Ask and answer questions. Conversations—even with a baby—help build your grandchild's language skills starting from birth.



Let's Pretend

One advantage of grandparenthood is that “being in charge” and “getting things done” can take a backseat to just having fun. Pretend play helps kids develop empathy for others because they’ve “tried on” different roles and situations—and you’re the perfect play partner. Here are some ideas:

- Starting at about 2 years old, follow your grandchild’s lead and see where his imagination takes you. A tea party for teddy bears? Perfectly fine. Superheroes and bad guys? All good.
- Ask your grandchild what part you should play or what should happen next. These playtime experiences build a child’s self-confidence, thinking skills, and social-emotional skills. Want to know more? ZERO TO THREE has [plenty to share](#) about the role of play in a baby’s life.

Read It Again!

You’ve probably read and reread many favorite books with your grandchildren. Keep it up! When you read to babies, the roots of language are literally built in their brains. The more words babies hear over time, the more words they learn and say.

You can nurture these early literacy skills by sharing stories, starting from birth.

- Let babies chew the corners of a sturdy board book while you read along.
- Let toddlers skip forward and back through a book, turn the pages, or act out a story.
- Ask preschoolers to “read” the story to you by telling you what’s happening in the pictures.
- Ask questions about what’s happening in the story: “Where is the moon?”

These experiences with books teach children that “reading” is a lot of fun (and so are you!). Telling stories to grandchildren is also another great idea—and favorite stories are almost always the ones that feature you or their parents as children. [Learn more](#) about early literacy from ZERO TO THREE and discover ways to help your grandchild become a reader, beginning from birth.