



# Long Distance Grandparents: Surviving the Separation



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In 2007, I began writing about what it felt like to turn 50 – including how it felt to be a long distance grandparent, and [FiftyIsTheNewForty.com](http://FiftyIsTheNewForty.com) was born! My daughter and son-in-law had recently relocated to another state quite a distance from me, and I was definitely having trouble coping with missing my two small granddaughters.

Several years later they are still far away, but we have built some traditions and habits that keep us in touch and close. At least as much as possible.

Grandparenting long distance is a challenge. It's not perfect. Nothing can substitute for the real thing, but there are rewards and joys beyond what you might ever have expected.

***This e-book is intended to provide inspiration, tips and strategies you can use immediately*** to help you create bonds with your grandchildren, your children and your family no matter where they may be.



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# Introduction

## Long Distance Grandparenting

As painful as it may be, kids grow up and leave home, begin lives and raise families of their own, often far from where they grew up. [So...congratulations if you've survived empty nest!](#)

Fortunately, there are many unique and simple ways to stay in touch with your grandkids and, as many grandparents already know, they really can help to bridge the gap across the miles. Whether your grandchildren have moved halfway across the world or just a few hours away, it's quite possible to stay involved in their lives.

Although long distance relationships can never replace being there, there are some nice benefits:

- You always get to be the fun ones.
- You'll learn to be more tech-savvy whether you like it or not
- Having family that is far away can challenge you in more ways that you might imagine, including having to travel and increasing your communication skills.



# I. Long Distance Grandparenting: The Challenges



Becoming a long distance grandparent is common in today's world. Our physical world has gotten smaller, with our kids joining the military or taking jobs that can be one state or half a world away. [Distance just isn't the hurdle it used to be.](#) Unless you are missing your grandchildren, of course...



## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

# The Facts:

- ✓ **It's painful.** Missing birthdays, family events, holidays and those little everyday growing milestones that are so precious. Sometimes you may have days where you just think, "How did this happen?"
- ✓ **They grow so fast.** Seeing your grandkids infrequently makes the physical changes so extreme when you do get to see them that you may feel overwhelmed with a feeling of sadness or loss.
- ✓ **You feel disconnected.** Visits may make you feel how little you do know about the daily lives of your grandchildren – and your children. The little things that make up their day-to-day existence.
- ✓ **The good news is...** When YOU roll into town, it's all good! You get to have fun, go places and do things, and just soak up being in each other's company. Being a long distance grandparent allows a lot of leeway for ratcheting up the "fun quotient"!



# The Challenges:

- ✓ **Distance.** Visiting in the flesh may be difficult. Or impossible. The spirit may be willing but the flesh (or the purse) weak when it comes to arranging face-to-face visits. You may still be working and unable to get there when you want to.
- ✓ **Time.** The window of opportunity for direct contact via phone, Skype, etc. may be very small for any number of reasons. Depending on where they are, you may be sleeping when they're awake or vice versa.
- ✓ **Access.** If your kids have decided to move to outer Mongolia or the far reaches of Antarctica, that in itself may prove to be the biggest challenge: phone, internet or mail service may be intermittent.
- ✓ **Relationships.** If your relationship with the parents of your grandchildren is strained, fractured or non-existent, you may have some work to do to overcome those problems. It may not happen the way you want it to or in the time frame you would like. Or, you may have only met your grandchild once or twice in person, and they may not be receptive to *you*.





## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

### The Possibilities:

Fortunately, meeting those challenges is getting easier! Technology has made getting and staying involved in their lives simpler and more fun than ever before.

The fact is, baby boomers are more tech savvy. Grandparents are healthier, many are still working and able to engage with their grandchildren in all kinds of active pursuits.

Life goes on, and who knows? Some time you may wake up and find out they're living right next door!



### Baby Boomer Facts:

- ✓ Close to 100% own computers
- ✓ 53% of them are on Facebook (driven in part by the arrival of grandchildren...)
- ✓ 71% of Boomers go online every day
- ✓ 66% send text messages (albeit not quite as many as their teenagers and grandchildren)"

*Source:*

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kernlewis/2012/11/09/pick-baby-boomers-as-your-target-market-for-the-holidays/>





# The Next Best Thing To Being There...

Spontaneity can be a rare commodity in a long distance relationship!

Keeping the lines of communication open is job #1! The simplest and easiest way is over the phone, of course, and even younger children in today's world have cell phones.

If you know their schedule, call them when they're in the car being driven home from dance class, on their way to an important academic event, or just in time to say good night. Encourage them to do the same.

“Nearly six out of 10 U.S. parents of children ages 8 to 12 (a.k.a. "tweeners" or tweens) have provided those children with cell phones.”

*Source: Consumer Reports.org*

**Tip:** Get in the habit of picking up the phone when you've seen a great movie and share it!



## II. Staying Close: Top 10 Tips & Tools of The Trade!



Forging and maintaining a close relationship as close to “normal” as possible requires some effort and creativity on your part!

The following strategies and suggestions provide ways you can take charge and bridge the gap between you and your grandchildren – not just the physical distance, but the natural and normal differences that occur between young and old under any circumstances.

Communication is the key, whether they are across the table, or across a continent. Your desire to be close and your proactive approach provides the conduit for a lasting relationship at any distance. These tips are designed to help get you on your way!



## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

### Tip #1 GRANDCHILDREN – YOU’VE GOT MAIL!

One of the easiest ways of sending your love to grandchildren who live far away is also the most “old-fashioned”.

**The US Mail brings you right to their door in a personal way...**who doesn’t love to get mail?

Make it a regular weekly commitment to send a card or a short note...the personal connection created via the US Mail is thoughtful and will cause your grandchild to pause and think about you in a way not typically created by an email.

Buy a book of their favorite cartoons...cut out and send with a card or note, or just a chuckle!



## Tip #2: REGULARLY SCHEDULED PHONE CALLS

Grandchildren *love* talking to their grandparents on the phone...sometimes! Two keys to making this a successful endeavor:

- **Ask open-ended questions** to avoid the short “yes or no” answers. Opt for something like, “Tell me what you did at the sleepover” rather than, “Did you have fun?”
- **Maintain a regular schedule** for your phone calls, especially for the older kids who get busy with their friends, activities, school, etc.
- **Tweens & Teens are a breed apart.** They may spend hours talking to their friends, but clam up when there’s an adult on the other end of the phone – any adult! Don’t take it personally.
- **Texting? Yes.** You’ll need to learn it...the doors it opens with pre-teens and teenagers when it comes to getting them to respond is – in a word – amazing. It’s what they do. Want to be a cool grandparent? This skill opens that door for you! (Teenagers seem to have rules of etiquette for texting that adults aren’t even privy to, but etiquette it is.)
- **Don’t take it personally!** Don’t be hurt or put off if your teen grandkids aren’t chatty with you...it’s all part of the age and they’re often the same way with any and all adults. Just keep asking those open ended questions and look for areas of interest that you share.



The Free Hugs Campaign  
Harajuku, Tokyo, Japan  
© Kalandrakas

*Photo credit:*  
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/eelssej\\_/438190053/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/eelssej_/438190053/)

## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

### Tip #3 KEEP THOSE PACKAGES & GIFTS COMING!

Weekly or monthly arrivals in the mailbox are a great way to create delight and engage....

You don't have to spend a lot of money: inexpensive toys, personal photographs, books, crayons and coloring books, even free coloring pages printed from the internet along with a personal note create anticipation and glee in young children.



Older kids absolutely love getting small packages – no matter what's in them. It's a personal and intimate way to maintain "top of mind awareness"!

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## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

### Tip #4: ONLINE GAMES & SOCIAL MEDIA

With newly updated privacy options, forums like Facebook, YouTube, and various other social media networks help you stay connected and look “way cool” in the eyes of your grandkids!

With the help of their parents, even younger kids can see what’s happening in your world, interact with family members, see pictures, videos and links to fun sites.

Privacy and safety are the key components here! Making sure that Mom and Dad are involved is essential.

Check out this great site:  
<http://Games.Grandparents.com/> - they have tons of great game ideas you can explore!



“30 percent of grandparents and 29 percent of teens agree that connecting online has helped them ‘better understand’ the other.”

<http://www.ajc.com/news/lifestyles/grandparents-build-more-online-ties-with-grandkids/nSRZ7/>





## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

### Tip #5: SEEING IS BELIEVING



This is one of the best ways to stay in touch in a personal way. Laptops and web cams are fairly inexpensive and truly the next best thing to being there. Skype has provided an entire generation of people with easy access to each other.

It gives you a chance to see each other in real time, talk, share and laugh almost in person.





## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

### Tip #6: LONG DISTANCE CELEBRATIONS

If you want to try something different, how about a long distance party?

Pick an event where you don't have to compete with their friends or school vacation...maybe [recognize an academic award or a lesser known holiday just for fun!](#)

Did you know you can send a surprise party package, complete with cake, confetti and candles? Or create a single party package you design yourself, with a fun hat, some balloons and a small gift and card. Doesn't need to be expensive, just unique and thoughtful.

Did you know that March 26<sup>th</sup> is Make Up Your Own Holiday Day? The perfect grandparent opportunity!



Visit  
[Library.Thinkquest.org/2886/](http://Library.Thinkquest.org/2886/)  
for a list of "lesser known"  
holidays!



## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

### Tip #7: PLAN YOUR VISIT

Planning a visit to your grandkids (or their visit to you) is a great way to get them excited, engage them in conversation, and prep them for your time together. You can even learn more about what they like to do and where they like to go before you get there.

Start by talking about things you would like to do when you are together...whatever it may be. Making cookies, seeing movies, amusement parks, swimming, whatever. You can even make a list and each time you talk, discuss some of the options on the list and hone down the choices.

The practicality of advanced planning helps to take the stress out of figuring out what to do once you get there. Besides, both – or all of you – may discover that the joy of anticipation is priceless.

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## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

### **Tip #8:** DON'T DESPAIR – PREPARE!

Have you ever been on the phone or on Skype with your grandkids and gotten off feeling like you have nothing in common with them? Happens to all of us.

**Important:** Have a list of 5 or 10 topics and questions you can touch on during your conversation...just having that list handy will help the conversation flow and eliminate those awkward moments.

Remember to ask open ended questions. You're not the only one who may feel ill at ease in conversation.



## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

### **Awesome Tip #9: SHARE YOUR HISTORY**

Sometimes kids are fascinated by the fact that we were young once! (One time my granddaughter saw an album I had and thought it was a huge antique cd!)

You can use a number of the strategies here to share what your life was like when you were their age!

- You can send them photos in the mail or email...
- Call them up out of the blue with an "I was just remembering when I was 14, I went to my first school dance and....."
- Share an online scrapbook of your photos with them, along with a video narration! (They can even help you with that).
- Make an audio tape for them – you can even send them one a month talking about what.



## LONG DISTANCE GRANDPARENTS

### **Awesome Tip #10: SHARE A HOBBY**

This one awesome tip can help you accomplish several of the others with ease! All kids love to talk about what they like to do, and you can share their enthusiasm via mail, phone, Skype, or during your visits.

Whether it's model trains, comic books, Barbies, drawing, coin or stamp collecting, fishing, sports, movies or photography, sharing a hobby presents endless opportunities for interaction with your grandchild – no matter their age or the distance!

- Share new "finds" via Skype or email
- Discuss what you can do during your next visit: a comic book collectors show...a professional sports game...taking time together to organize a collection of some sort...it's all about simple time together. As they say, "priceless"!
- Share your interests too: it's double the fun when you share what you love as well. You may be surprised how interested your grandchildren are in what interests *you*!



# III. Going the Distance

It's inevitable...at times you just miss `em no matter how much you do to stay in touch. So, how to deal with those feelings?

## **Sharing with Others**

You can't change the void created by the absence of having your children and their families close, particularly during the holidays.

You can, however, put those grandparent skills to good use.

- Participate in reading time at your local library.
- Volunteer in the pediatric ward of your local hospital.
- Offer to wrap gifts for an organization like the Salvation Army at your local mall.
- Assist in a local toy drive.

No matter how old you are, the giving of yourself through involvement with others always helps to bring joy and minimize the possibility of holiday depression.





# Additional Resources

## Online Resources for Long Distance Grandparents:

- [Grandparents.com](http://Grandparents.com)
- [FamBooks.com – Grandparenting From A Distance](http://FamBooks.com)
- [Grandparenting.org](http://Grandparenting.org)
- [Chiff.com – Grandparents](http://Chiff.com)
- [Grandloving.com](http://Grandloving.com)
- [Grandparentgames.com](http://Grandparentgames.com)
- [Family.com\(Disney\)](http://Family.com)

## Articles

- [Over The River & Through The Woods: Long Distance Grandparenting](#) (Psychology Today)
- [Grandparents' Holiday Survival Guide](#) (AARP)

