

PUTTING THE GRAND IN GRANDPARENTS - THE IMPORTANT ROLE THEY PLAY IN CHILDREN'S LIVES

Have you ever heard someone say, "If I knew grandkids were this fun I would've had them first?" Well, there's such a special bond between grandparent and grandchild, and we grandparents love to spend time with those little ones. If a child is deaf or hard of hearing, many grandparents want to know how they can help and support, not just their grandchild, but also their child, who is the parent. So whether you're a grandparent watching this, or you're a parent looking for ideas to share with your own parents, let's explore ways grandparents can support the journey to listening and talking.

Hi, I'm Dr. Teresa Caraway with Hearing First. We're here to help and support families just like yours, who have a child with hearing loss. We want to empower you, as your child learns to listen, talk, read, and thrive, just like kids with typical hearing.

As a speech language pathologist, mother, and grandmother, I've got some great tips and ideas for grandparents of children with hearing loss. In this video, we'll share some heartwarming stories of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, and their rich and full relationships with their grandparents.

First, I'd like to introduce Corlena, and her very best friend, her grandma. Let's see how listening and spoken language help this relationship flourish.

Dad: Corlena's relationship with Grandmama is better than any relationship she has with anybody in this world.

Mom: It is hilarious. It is unbreakable.

Dad: Grandmama is like her very best friend. It's her grandmother, of course. It's like her sister. It's like they're girlfriends. They like two little golden girls together. Grandmama and Corlena.

Grandmama: Now this time I'm gonna help you 'cause you, last time what happened with our egg? All right. You gonna do this one all by yourself. Uh-oh! We gotta get the shells off. Keep doing it!

Corlena: Spinning like hot chocolate! But it's not hot chocolate.

Grandmama: It's like hot chocolate, but not hot chocolate?

Mom: Corlena eats everything because of Grandmama.

Dad: They do a lot of things together. They cook, they clean. You'll see Corlena, she cleans up better than everybody in this house, because Grandmama cleans up after everything. Their relationship, their bond, is the strongest bond I've ever seen in my entire life. So, when it comes to the whole family, choosing listening and spoken language is probably the best decision we ever made.

Listening and spoken language also helped little Ethan connect with his grandparents, who take such delight in him. And Ethan's mom is grateful that he can have a positive relationship with his grandparents, and fulfill their dreams as grandparents.

Grandfather: You ready?

Ethan: Mhmm.

Grandfather: Okay. I'm gonna throw it a little farther out this time, okay? [Water splashes]

Mom: All right! Good job!

Grandfather: Good job! Good job.

Mom: Nana and grandfather are my mom and dad, and the boys enjoy going over there every once in a while, and they get to play on the playground, swim in the pool. Grandparents, they do what grandparents do. They spoil the kids, love on them, and just enjoy that time.

Grandfather: A little to the right! There you go!

Man: All right, straighten it out!

Grandfather: Okay!

Man: Straighten it out!

Mom: All right!

Man: Other way!

Grandfather: Okay, let me help you. Let me help you. Turn, turn, turn, turn! Oh, that's right! [Laughter]

Hearing loss has not impacted the relationship that Ethan has with his grandparents. They are astonished every day at the new things that he might say, or the way he communicates his ideas or his feelings. He is having fun, and my parents are enjoying being grandparents just the same.

When Fletcher was identified as having hearing loss, his mother was worried about what that would mean for his relationship with his grandparents and cousins. Alex is from a close-knit family with many traditions, and she wanted to make sure he could fully participate in his grandmother's weekly Sunday night dinners, with all the aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Mom: Every Sunday night, my parents have all of us over for dinner. I was kind of imagining all of us talking and laughing and him just not getting to participate in it. I immediately thought of all the things his dad and my dad do with the kids, like going to the lake and going to the river and going hunting, and he's gonna be excluded from all that stuff. His world just got really small. The hardest things for me to think of was family dinner, and to think about him just being excluded. But it's completely opposite of what we expected.

Fletcher: Does anyone want chips?

Dad: I want some, Fletch!

Grandfather: Hey! Thank you, Fletch!

Aunt: Fletcher, how was golf? Did you beat George?

Fletcher: Yeah. I actually swung it like, and it like, broke the tee.

Aunt: You hit it so hard.

Fletcher: And the golf ball just went like, straight. And like, in the air.

Aunt: [Laughter]

Mom: They are so competitive!

The best part about grandparents? They can bring unconditional love, uninhibited fun, and a unique perspective. So no matter if you're close by, or far away, you play a role on this journey. Here are some suggestions to try.

- **Stay involved and engaged.** This means asking questions and staying connected. Celebrate wins and accomplishments together. Offer encouragement during some of the most challenging moments. The best thing you can do is to be there for your child as they navigate parenting your grandchild.
- **Share your experiences.** Talk, talk, and talks some more to your grandchild. Tell them stories and share about yourself and your life. All of this helps their understanding and vocabulary grow. Grandparents can add so much listening, language, and learning fun for the kids.
- **Listen and support.** You'll need to respect the parent's choice, and their journey for their child. Besides loving your grandchildren fiercely, grandparents have an important role to play as a support system. Be there for your child, as they experience the ups and downs of parenting, and let them lean on you. Respect their journey, and ask how you can help reach their goals.

- **Read books aloud at every visit.** Whether you see your grandkids once a week, or only once a year, incorporate books into your visits. Reading aloud together is such a wonderful way to bond, and reading aloud, no matter how young that baby is, helps grow their brain for a lifetime of listening, talking, and learning.
- **Share family photos and talk about who different family members are.** Tell family stories. You can do this with photo albums, or using pictures on your phone.

If you're a grandparent who lives nearby, you can be a little more hands-on in your role. For example, you can ask for instructions on how to handle hearing devices. The more you know about them, the more you can help. Your grandchild needs to wear devices during all waking hours, for their little brain to access all the sounds of speech. You can be a big help by making sure those devices stay on, no matter how many times they come off in a day. You can also ask about what they've been working on in early intervention, so you can use those same strategies and techniques to help your grandchild learn to listen and talk, and asking mom and dad to explain to you is good practice for them, also. It's a win-win! You might even ask to tag along to an early intervention session, or offer to go if a scheduling conflict pops up.

If you live further away from your grandkids, there is still a lot you can do. Today's technology helps build strong relationships across the miles, no matter the distance. Consider having video calls to continually build your relationship with your grandchild. You can still play peekaboo, or read books aloud with video calls. Find out what works best. Maybe you read the books and show the pictures over the video call, or even better, ask to join mom and dad during story time, as they read aloud, so you can open the book too, and participate in the conversation. Another fun idea to use when you're connecting through video, is to create a surprise box or bag. Each of you have the same box or bag with the same little toys or books inside. Open it up at the same time over a video call. You can share what you found inside the box, and talk about it. The more words you use to describe, the better. Make up silly songs about the object, and enjoy playing together from far away.

Grandparents, you have an opportunity to play such an important role in your grandchild's life.

No matter where you are on this journey, or how you may be feeling, you are not alone. Hearing First is here to help you every step of the way. We have a Facebook group for families of children with hearing loss, and grandparents are more than welcome to join and ask questions, find support, and learn more. Subscribe to the YouTube channel to see the latest videos. And visit hearingfirst.org for more information, resources, and support along this journey.