Activities for Grandchildren: Discovering Local Opportunities

While some grandchildren live with their grandparents, many others are cared for by grandparents in a more part-time capacity. Grandparents may not realize the importance of play in young children’s lives.

Grandparents often report amazement at the number of organized activities available to children today. The availability of club, sports, music, drama, and camp activities provide wonderful potential options for families. While care must be taken not to become over-involved, most grandchildren will benefit from participation in some community-oriented activities.

**Sports**

Sports may play a large role in many grandchildren’s lives. Athletic participation has not only great physical benefits, including increased cardiovascular endurance and strength and decreased obesity, but social benefits as well.

Research studies report that individuals who participate in sports have more positive body images, higher states of psychological well-being, and decreased levels of depression. The Institute for Athletics and Education found that high school girls who play sports are 80% less likely to become involved in an unwanted pregnancy, 92% less likely to use drugs, and are 3 times more likely to graduate from high school.

When grandchildren play sports, caregivers should encourage building new skills versus competition and winning. Summer recreation programs, sports camps, swimming lessons, and school and community related sports teams can offer the positive experiences that enhance physical development.

**Participation in the Arts**

Great variety for participation also exists in the arts. Drama, drawing, songs, and movement are the early “languages” of young children, allowing them to express themselves while enhancing essential skills.

One study of 25,000 middle and high school students found that those who were involved in the arts had higher grades, achieved higher scores on standardized tests and were more likely to be involved in community activities.

Providing grandchildren with opportunities to participate in the arts has great potential benefits. Community theater groups and dance companies often design performances to capture the attention of young children.

Many communities offer workshops, classes, and summer day camps on numerous visual and performing arts. Museums also provide programs that
emphasize cultural and historical activities. Children’s museums design specialized exhibits and activities with great “kid appeal.”

**Nature**

Children discover the world by using their senses when they see, hear, feel, touch and even taste. Involvement in nature and science activities helps grandchildren enhance learning through interactions with the physical world.

Nature centers and Arboretums present a wide variety of programming for children where they can wander in wooded areas, observe wildlife, and discover plants and wild flowers. State parks conduct guided tours, living history re-enactments and nature walks. Opportunities for families to “camp-out” all night provide grandchildren with new experiences and create family memories. A visit to the zoo assists grandchildren in learning about animals. Most zoos have extensive educational programming and activities with hands-on involvement.

**Clubs**

Socialization and leadership skills can be fostered in group and club experiences. In most communities grandchildren can join boys and girls clubs, 4-H, scouting, and similar groups which provide them with role models, opportunities to learn new skills, and access to friends of similar ages. Grandchildren can also access organized activities by joining the local Youth Centers, YMCA/YWCAs, and neighborhood recreational centers. Church-related activities, including Sunday School, youth groups, Vacation Bible School, and church camps can nurture spiritual, emotional, and social development.

**Special Considerations**

Allocation of family resources, including time and money, should be a priority. An important consideration for many families, especially those with several grandchildren, is cost. While many activities involve some cost, most communities do a good job with free or low-cost options, especially during the summer months. Scholarship programs are often available to reduce cost to qualified families.

Grandparents can present selected options to grandchildren for discussion and then choose one or two activities to pursue. Organizing the family calendar and listing important information related to grandchildren’s planned activities will be helpful. Grandchildren will enhance cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills through participation in selected group activities. Choosing activities that are safe, well-supervised, and fun will increase benefits to grandparents as well as grandchildren.

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