

Reading With Your Grandchild

“If you see a book, a rocking chair, and a grandchild in the same room, don’t pass up a chance to read aloud. Instill in your grandchildren a love of reading. It’s one of the greatest gifts you can give.”

Barbara Bush

Reading stories with your grandchild is one of the easiest, most powerful ways to build a close relationship, as well as contribute to their education. Intergenerational educator Susan V. Bosak, MA, runs workshops with grandparents across the country. Here are some of Susan’s top tips for reading to your grandchild. For more tips, information, ideas, and activities, visit www.somethingtoremembermeby.org.

- ① **Make books a big part of your grandchild’s life:** From the time they are born, surround your grandchild with books of all kinds. Start your own family book club, giving your grandchild a new book each month (if you’re a long-distance grandparent, send audiotapes of yourself reading stories). Take your grandchild on frequent trips to the library (get them their own card) and to the bookstore.
- ② **The right story for the right time:** The times for stories are when a child has been energetic and is ready for a quiet activity, and at bedtime. Simple, repetitive stories with reassuring themes are best before bed. More active or thought-provoking stories are better for a reading session during the day. Whenever you read, eliminate all distractions (e.g. television, radio, phone, etc.) and focus just on your grandchild.
- ③ **Cuddle, cuddle, cuddle:** Children need physical contact. Find a comfortable chair or couch to cuddle up on. Don’t forget to give your grandchild an extra squeeze during scary or tender parts of a story.
- ④ **Encourage active participation:** For very young children, even getting them to help turn a book’s pages gets them more involved in the story. If there is repetition in the story, say these phrases together. If the story is a favorite one, let your grandchild finish



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familiar sentences. If your grandchild is old enough to read, take turns reading parts of the story.

- ⑤ **Read a book twice at one sitting:** Read a book the first time for a general sense of the words and the story. Use plenty of expression – ham it up! Then read the book again to identify themes, to make connections from one part of the story to another, and to look more closely at the cover and illustrations. The second reading is particularly important with older grandchildren.
- ⑥ **Make “The End” of the story your beginning:** A story can bring up new ideas or difficult topics. It can start conversations in a natural way (children will be more receptive than if you try to force a conversation at another time). It can also be a bridge to sharing your memories.
- ⑦ **Use a story as a creative experience:** Encourage your grandchild to use their imagination to fill in or extend a story. This develops their storytelling skills.
- ⑧ **Extend stories into your relationship:** Take parts of a story and make them a part of your relationship with your grandchild. For example, if you’ve read a book with nature themes, immediately plan to go on a walk with your grandchild to look for the flowers or birds from the story.

Suggested Resources

Something to Remember Me By: An Illustrated Story for Young and Old by Susan V. Bosak and illustrated by Laurie McGaw (The Communication Project, 1997). This award-winning storybook is ideal to share with grandchildren, and also inspired the national *Something to Remember Me By* Legacy Project. For free information, ideas, activities, and contests for grandparents and grandchildren, visit the project website at www.somethingtoremembermeby.org or call (800) 772-7765.

How to Build the Grandma Connection by Susan V. Bosak (The Communication Project, 2000). Based on the author’s popular Grandma Connection Workshops. Filled with ideas and tips for grandparents near and far to help “make the connection” with their grandchildren. Also includes a complete list of the best intergenerational storybooks to share with grandchildren.

The Read-Aloud Handbook (5th Edition) by Jim Trelease (Penguin, 2001). The classic book that helps parents and grandparents read aloud to children and encourage them to become avid readers themselves. Includes a wonderful treasury of read-aloud suggestions.