

## A GUESTS' VIEW

## Grandparents, grandkids, and education

By Robert R. Neuman

Grandparents and grandkids can have a very special relationship. Free of the daily entanglements that parents face, grandparents can have grandchild conversations that are different. Grandkids often are more willing to believe and accept what grandparents say, making these conversations more effective. So, when a grandparent echoes a parental message, the words can add weight.

Most parents appreciate the support grandparents can offer, especially in talking about education. Because kids have a thousand things going on every day to distract them from school matters, they need to be reminded often about the importance of education in their lives. Grandparents can help.

I know how influential grandparents can be, having witnessed these relationships first-hand in my family. In my professional life as an academic dean, I acted as an authoritative "uncle" with thousands of college students, who often were experiencing academic predicaments. But my words were reaching those students late in their educational lives. I came to appreciate the role that grandparents can play in their grandkids' lives when they

start *early* to discuss topics like hard work, achievement, study time, college, and life goals.

Here are some tips to help you, as a grandparent, deliver this important message:

1. Frequently ask your grandchildren how they are doing in school. Let them know that while friends, sports, and entertainment are fun, school should be of primary importance in their lives.
2. Take an interest in their education and encourage them to achieve. Whenever possible, attend their school events.
3. Talk about your own education, profession, and accomplishments. Explain how your education has affected your life in terms of employment, personal growth, and financial planning and security.
4. Emphasize that education can determine success in many areas of life, so kids should take it seriously. Getting organized, developing good work habits, and scheduling regular times to study in middle school and high school will lead to

success in college, where the pace is faster and the classes require more independent work.

5. When possible, reward your grandkids—not just for good grades, but for their academic *efforts*, especially for improvement in courses they find difficult.

### The need for a broad education

As children grow, grandparents should build on the message that education is especially important in the "information age." Many jobs that our grandkids will hold do not exist yet. What does that mean? Kids must become flexible learners who can adapt. They must have broad educations to prepare them for tomorrow's workplace.

Grandparents are positioned to cheer kids on to work hard in all their subjects, even those they find difficult or don't like. That's important because it can prevent kids from narrowing their educations. For example, students who decide they're not good at math take the minimum number of math courses in high school and just scrape by. However, because young students don't know what the future holds, they must be good at everything so they are well-rounded

enough to qualify for many jobs and careers. When they close the door on an academic area like math, science, or reading, they close the door on an area of opportunity.

Furthermore, because young students are not forward-looking, they don't understand that when they avoid certain types of high school courses they will lack the prerequisites to take college courses in that academic area. Even at the age of 15 or 16, students can begin to narrow their prospects.

### Learning about occupations

When kids get to middle school, grandparents should talk often about their own career or profession. They should also encourage grandkids to talk to uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents' friends about the skills needed to do their jobs. It's a way to help young people learn about occupations and career areas they might want to explore.

As kids get older, they may be drawn to a certain career. At that point, the real question becomes not *What do you want to be?* but *How are you going to do that?* Grandparents can encourage teens to find out more. Teens interested in being a veterinarian need to start thinking about what's really entailed in the occupation. It's not just helping animals. It's biochemistry, too, and kids must take courses that will further their goals. Grandparents can help kids see that when they set life goals for themselves, their studies become more important.

Grandparents can be a crucial influence in readying students to be lifelong learners—which is what their lives will be about.



Robert R. Neuman, PhD, is author of *Are You Really Ready for College? A College Dean's 12 Secrets for Success*. He wrote this article for Best Times readers. His book is available at [www.areyoureallyreadyforcollege.com](http://www.areyoureallyreadyforcollege.com) or online at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other online booksellers. Written especially for teens, the book includes questionnaires, student stories, checklists, quick tips, and tactics.

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