

5/28/13
For GAN:

Long-Distance Grandparenting: 8 Ways to Stay in Touch with Your Grandchild with ASDs

By Debora Smith
[Autism Resource Mom](#)

We parents know the vital role grandparents play in the lives of our kids with autism spectrum disorders [ASDs]. They provide patience and understanding, unconditional love and in many cases they help with child care, finances and health care. Studies have even found that as many as one in three grandparents may have noticed autistic-like behaviors in their grandchildren prior to diagnosis. This additional support is invaluable to us.

But not all grandparents live close by. My folks are snowbirds from Michigan—fortunately for my son, they come out to California and live for three months in the winter. My son loves every minute of it.

Over the years, my parents have learned that their grandson requires a few extras from grandma and grandpa—like a mega-dose of perseverance and an über-willingness to plan ahead to prepare him for what's coming next. And as they've learned about him and his way of being, it has been a special joy of mine to watch my mom and dad as they teach others about autism.

It should come as no surprise that researchers classify diverse forms of grandparenting that include everything from the mentor, nurturer and role model to the hero, playmate and wizard. And these classifications hold whether you live across town or across the country.

Those of you who are 'long-distance' grandparents may *think* you play a lesser role, but that doesn't have to be the case.

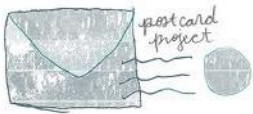
Here are eight fun ways to stay in touch with your grandkids—you may be surprised to find that you'll be indirectly helping your children, as well.

1. SOCIAL SECURITY—If you feel secure enough to venture into social media, communicate using the Internet. Truly, it's not that difficult, as more than half of adults over 65 are online these days. From texting and email to Facebook [FB] and instant messaging, the opportunities are endless.



My dad constantly comments on my teenager's FB posts and his encouragement has such a positive impact. You can also agree on a time to call your grandchild's cell phone—or simply call on the home phone—but **schedule it**. Make a big deal about it. Have "news" and questions ready for an older child; for a young one, keep it simple. And be prepared to listen.

2. YOU'VE GOT MAIL—Who doesn't love to get mail? Never underestimate the power of a good old-fashioned letter. It



doesn't even have to be long—just a few sentences. I've kept some notes my parents sent to my son when he was younger—with pictures or comics they thought he'd enjoy. We treasure these! Postcards are fun, too. Send regularly just to say you're thinking of them. You can even send a packet of self-addressed and stamped postcards for the kids to write/draw on and send back to you.



3. WHAT'S ALL THE HYPE ABOUT SKYPE?—First of all,



it's free! All you need is a computer and a webcam and you can place a video call. This beats the plain old telephone call any day because you get actual *face time*—and for families separated by miles, there's nothing better.



4. **ONCE UPON A TIME**—Every kid enjoys having a loved one read aloud



his favorite book. This is not just for grandparents who live nearby. You can do this via Skype. Or you can record yourself [audio/video/both] reading the child's beloved story—and mail it to him, along with a handmade bookmark or a photo of you.

5. **SHARE AN INTEREST, PERIODICALLY**—

Another way to thrill the grandkids with mail is to buy them a subscription to a special magazine—and ask them to call, Skype or email you each time a new issue arrives. Invite them to tell you about the page they liked best.



6. **PICTURE THIS**—Send a disposable camera and ask your grandchild to take pictures of herself, her family, friends, pets and favorite things to do.

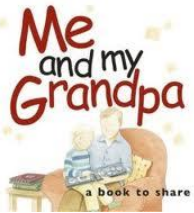
Get the parents to mail the camera back to you. You can develop the photos and make a little album to send as a gift—or bring it with you on your next visit. You and your grandchild can spend time together while she explains each photo.



7. **CELEBRATE THE DAY**—Nowadays there's an "awareness day" for practically everything. Did you know that June 21 is [National Flip Flop Day](http://www.national-awareness-days.com)? Bet you didn't know that July 28 is [National Day of the Cowboy](http://www.national-awareness-days.com)! All it takes is knowing what your grandkid likes and this website address:

<http://www.national-awareness-days.com> and you'll be 'in the know.' Share this site with the parents and get their input. Your grandkids will be delightfully surprised and they'll be left wondering, "How did Grandma know...?" when you send them a card or email noting the special day. Or kick it up a notch and send your grandchild a copy of "Matilda" by Roald Dahl on September 13—[Roald Dahl Day](http://www.national-awareness-days.com), of course!

8. **SAY CHEESE!**—Every time you are together with your grandchild(ren), take lots of photos, for sure, but always take a **certain identical pose**. For example, a picture of you and your grandchild sitting together reading, talking, eating, laughing.



Whatever. The child will always know what it looks like to be with you. Frame the photos so they can surround him. If you do this each time you're together, the child will "grow up with you" in the pictures. Both you and he will enjoy them.

Down the block or thousands of miles away, we couldn't do it without you—the mentors and nurturers, role models and heroes, playmates and wizards. Nana and poppa, gram and gramps, whatever you are called, you are a wonderful asset in our lives. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you for everything.

#