

Falling In Love With Your Child: Part III
Lessons from Grandparents
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I have been in love with my daughter since the minute I knew I was pregnant. That love grows deeper and stronger every day and with each new event: From birth, to her first smile and first laugh, and each time she learns something new. I just cannot get enough of her. I have an unquenchable thirst for her. It is the feeling of being in love. The feeling of falling in love with your child is what I am attempting to express in this series of articles. We began the series with capturing the feeling of falling in love by savoring each moment with your child; relishing in the precious present stage of your child's life. We learned to enjoy our children and take the time to really know them and appreciate where they are in the moment. The second article focused on the barriers to maintaining that feeling of being in love. Life oftentimes gets in our way and obstructs our view of the important elements. It is crucial to remain focused on our children in a positive frame. Our focus will determine how we view the outcome: If we view our child's behavior as negative, we can become clouded by the negative and transfer that feeling to our child. In that article, we learned how to reframe our view of negative behaviors into a positive view so that we can maintain the feeling of being in love with our child. Further, when we know our children's emotional needs, we can create situations in which those needs are met rather than allowing the child to determine when to meet his own emotional needs, which often leads to getting in trouble.

For this last article, I thought we could all learn from the wisdom and experience of grandparents. When interviewing people, I found that grandparents had a unique perspective on the idea of falling in love with their children and grandchildren. Further, they had distinctly different experiences with their children versus their grandchildren.

Becoming a parent introduces an entirely new world of responsibilities, concerns, chores, and emotions. The cliché "Having a baby changes everything" is quite true. A parent's world changes forever; both positive and negative changes occur. Along with the joy, excitement, and overwhelming love comes fear, stress, and a feeling of being overwhelmed at times. Parents must bear the responsibility of rearing our children and teaching them the skills and values they need to succeed in life. The responsibilities of a parent continue through all stages and trials of life. Parents have the busiest jobs, of which parenting is only one aspect. Tina Dickerson, of Alpine, Tennessee and grandmother of three stated, "Of course, while you're trying to rear 3 children, take care of a husband, do the cleaning, cooking, washing, yard work, and hold down a job, it all seems to pass so quickly - largely due to the "busy-ness" of life!" With as many responsibilities as parents have, it is difficult to fulfill all of the necessary roles. Grandparents, on the other hand, are in a completely different role.

Grandparents experience their grandchildren in a unique way that parents are often not able to do. This difference between parenting and grand-parenting allows grandparents to fulfill a special role in their grandchildren's lives. Janie Lawson, of

Baton Rouge, Louisiana and grandmother of two stated, "It was easy to fall in love with my grand daughter. We waited so long for grandchildren that it was a joy. Being a grandparent is wonderful." When asked about the love of grandchildren, Tina replied, "Look deep into children's eyes daily and you will see the love of God staring back at you - it's a gift." Doll Campbell, of Ouray, Colorado and grandmother of seven recounted about her relationship with her grandkids, "We have this attraction to each other. When they like me, it is just amazing. There is a comfort zone in the relationship for both the adult and child that makes way for a very special bond." Lora Taylor, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and grandmother of two stated, "I love my girls, but I am in love with my grandchildren. I love my grandchildren in part because I love my daughter. She loves them; therefore, I love them."

Grandparents experience the joy of children without the responsibilities and stress of wondering if they are making all the right choices and decisions. Janie noted, "As a parent, I was too busy trying to run a household to play with my children as much as I play with my grandchildren. I can play with my grandchildren more than I could with my own children because I am not in charge of the house and I am not the disciplinarian." Doll stated, "With my children, I was busy with life-the everyday things. With my own kids, there is always the feeling of responsibility. But with my grandkids, I don't have to worry about limits and boundaries. I can just enjoy them and delight in them, and they feel that somehow." Sacky Holdiness, of Meridian, Mississippi and grandmother of four noted, "I only have my grandchildren for a moment in time so we spend that time enjoying each other and having fun. They do things with us that they could not do anywhere else." Lora said, "As a parent, I was really busy and did not spend the time thinking about the important things as I do now with my grandchildren. Grandparents are in a totally different place in life. I can now recognize that some things are not as important as I once thought." Dawn Reaves, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and grandmother of four, she noted, We are more aware of what is important now than we were with our children. We allow our grandkids to make more mistakes realizing that mistakes are not a bad thing; mistakes are how we learn and grow. As parents, we wanted everything to be perfect, but now we realize that getting upset over little things is not as important.

The grandparent role offers a freedom that the parenting role lacks. Grandparents can spend their time getting to know the child and enjoying each aspect. Parents are busy with taking care of the child's needs and raising a family, which is why relishing each moment is difficult and must be nurtured. Grandparents, on the other hand, are free to have all the fun and leave the responsibility to the parents. Doll stated, "Grandchildren offer a sense of freedom. I don't feel the need to take care of them; I don't feel the responsibility. I have the freedom to listen to them and just enjoy them." Van Chesney, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and grandmother of twelve said, "I have the freedom to just be a grandparent. As a grandparent, I have no responsibility; I am not the last resort." Lora stated, "With my grandchildren, I have the opportunity to step back and let them be who they are."

Grandparents' roles can change if they are rearing their grandchildren. In this case, the grandparents must assume the role of a parent rather than a grandparent. As a result, both the child and grandparent sacrifice the unique grandparent role. When grandparents are rearing their grandchildren, grandparents often report feeling a sense of loss for the grandparent/grandchild relationship. Sacky was the primary caretaker of two of her grandchildren for six weeks as a result of their mother having surgery. During that time Sacky reported a shift in her role. She struggled with the necessity of maintaining a routine and wanting to fulfill their typical roles as grandparent and grandchildren. She stated, "I didn't like being the parent. I enjoy my role as a grandparent, and being structured put a damper on our fun." Dawn and her husband are rearing two of their four grandchildren. "We have different roles with our grandkids who live with us and our other grandkids. Sometimes we try to be parent and grandparent like when we have ice cream for supper. When raising grandkids, the grandparent-grandchild relationship is an appreciated bond on both sides whereas the relationship with our children was taken for granted. Our grandchildren thank us for taking care of them. They understand the difference. We had to go through a process of accepting the role as parents rather than grandparents. In the beginning, we didn't know if we could do it again, but it evolved to a point that they are our children." In order to make the shift, grandparents must accept and embrace the new role rather than continuously long for the previous role.

Each of the grandparents interviewed offered their advice to parents about parenting and falling in love with your children.

Tina: "I think my best advice to parents would be to realize that some things just don't matter! If what your child is saying or doing isn't hurting anything or anyone, lighten up and enjoy the moment! Remember that dirt washes out of clothes and vacuums up off of floors! (And no child ever died from eating "mud pies"!) Don't expect perfection from your children - encourage them to "strive" for perfection, but don't expect them to achieve it."

"I wish all parents would listen to the advice of their parents, take what they can use, and throw out the rest. After children are grown and on their own, all parents should remember that they did the best they could with what they knew at the time as they were rearing their children. Share your failures and your successes with others - we all learn so much from each other. Teach your children about God and His love for them every single day of their lives - it's what makes life worth living - and in some way, it explains the "unexplainable" love of a parent for a child."

Doll: "Make time to listen to your children. It's important to them and builds trust. Listening to your children helps you learn more about them and what they struggle with and what they think. I spent lots of time with my children and was very nurturing, but now after having grandchildren, I realize the importance of listening. I wish I had listened more as a parent."

Janie: "Be in constant contact with your grandkids. I talk to my daughter and granddaughter every day and send her little gifts. I find out what she likes and I do that

for her. Feelings follow actions: the more you do loving things for people, the more you feel love for them.”

Lora: “Don’t take everything so seriously. Parents often stress over things that they don’t need to worry about. The stages kids go through are short lived and they will soon be passed them. Most issues will resolve themselves in time. Timing is everything.”

“Try to view your child’s behavior in a positive way. Ask yourself, ‘What will this behavior look like as a teenager or as an adult?’ Know that a strong willed two-year-old may be the teenager who doesn’t follow the crowd. Changing the way you see the behavior now will help you to appreciate your child more and be less stressed in the moment.”

Van: “Know what is difficult for you and prepare ahead of time for strategies to get a hold of your own disposition when you struggle or expect problems. Pay attention to when your pressure times are and prepare activities to keep the children occupied during those times.”

“The greatest thing a parent can do is learn patience. Concentrate on being patient, gentle, and quiet and try not to deal with everything.”

Dawn: “Love is not a feeling; it’s a verb, an action. You may not approve of everything your children do, but you can still love them.” It’s the consistent loving action at the time no matter what they do that shows love. Doing what’s best for them is loving them, but it’s not always the easiest thing to do.”

Sacky: “Stay in the moment. The moment is all we have in our hands. We don’t know what will happen tomorrow. If you are waiting for the next event to occur, you will miss what is happening right now. Babies change so quickly. Appreciate where each child is at that moment in time and relish every stage. Receive the gift that each child brings at that time because tomorrow your child will be different.”

“Try to see the world or what is happening in life through your child’s eyes. You will get a different perspective.”

We are so blessed to have grandparents who fulfill a role in our lives that our parents cannot fill. Parents have the responsibility of rearing children, teaching values, and disciplining children as well as keeping house and earning a living. Parents cannot be all things to their children. Although it is important for parents to take time away from household tasks to enjoy their children and live in the moment, parents do not have the luxury of doing that all of the time. Grandparents do. The relationship between a child and a grandparent is uniquely special and should be cherished. Grandparents are not going to do everything the way parents do; they are not supposed to. Don’t stress out when Grandma or Grandpa don’t discipline your way or let the children do things you wouldn’t let them do. Instead, feel blessed that your children have a relationship with someone who loves them and is focused only on them. You as parents are laying the foundation for their lives. Grandparents are fostering their sense of self and teaching them about love from an entirely different perspective by saying ‘You are loved because

you are you. I want to know everything about you and enjoy every moment we have together.'

As Sacky said, just as each stage your child experiences is short lived, so are our lives. We never know what tomorrow will bring. One day, each of us will be without grandparents and will remember fondly those moments in time. Help your children have a magical experience by fostering the grandparent-grandchild relationship and letting them fall in love.

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