

# Parenting “Do Over” for Grandparents

By Jeb Egbert

**L**ife doesn't give us the opportunity for “do-overs.” I certainly wish it did. There are things I have regretted about how I've handled particular time periods or relationships in my life. Perhaps you feel the same way. Ever pine for missed opportunities? I've sometimes whispered to myself, “If I only had known then what I know now, I might have handled that situation better.”

But I didn't know then what I know now, and neither did you.

I have the privilege of leading workshops on parenting, and inevitably quite a few grandparents attend. One of the recurring questions I ask during these workshops is “if you had a ‘do-over,’ how would you change your approach to parenting?” My purpose for the question is not to open up feelings of regret, but rather to listen to the voice of experience.

Perhaps the most consistent answer I hear is, “I would focus more on the love I have for my children and less on rules and discipline.” Variations of this response include “I would tell my children I love them more frequently than I did.” Another is, “I would work harder to understand how my son or daughter interpreted my behaviors as loving and seek to make adjustments.”

That's an interesting response, because it implies that our children truly are unique, and while some may know they are loved by hearing the words “I love you,” to others those words might seem hollow and lifeless. They might prefer spending a day at the beach with their mom or dad, or perhaps receiving a gift. It's no secret that different children interpret love from their parents differently.

You may have heard grown adults share with great sadness their pain over the fact that their father or mother “never told me they loved me.” On the other hand, some who didn't hear those words never doubted their parents' love in spite of the lack of verbal affirmation.

## Some “do-over” questions

I always follow up the discussions about increased demonstrative love by asking a rhetorical question: “Does this mean that you wouldn't have any rules or discipline?” The response is typically, “Oh no. There

would certainly be rules and discipline. It's just that my recollection of my parenting style was an over-emphasis on rules and discipline. I thought rearing my child was more important than showing them love in demonstrable ways.”

Many grandparents say they wished they had spent more time with their kids when they were growing up. Some turn melancholy when they reflect on years gone by and the relationships with their offspring that they feel were never really cemented by an investment of time.

Some say they would have been more intentional about showing spiritual leadership within the family. When I probe about this, the responses range from a desire to have modeled a more overt spiritual focus in their own lives, to wishing they had led more family Bible discussions or more often modeled sharing the gospel with others. Others muse about their perception of the gaps that existed between their professed Christian allegiance and the reality of the lives they led. They wonder whether their areas of personal hypocrisy might have set up a stumbling block for their children.

I thoroughly enjoy listening to the hearts of these “grand” parents. They have much to share. It is inspiring to know that in spite of the many pitfalls of parenting and our lack of parental perfection, God so deeply loves our children that he never ceases to look after them.

Most parents do not make willful mistakes in how they raise their children. The vast majority with whom I speak love their children and wanted to be “the perfect parent” for them.

We don't have a chance for a do-over. But we can share the lessons of experience with one another and our loved ones. We can also pray for young parents and their children and find ways to provide a word of encouragement and support. And we can rest in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, knowing that his perfect work in the lives of our children is complete, although not fully apparent at this time. Regardless of all we did or did not do as parents, the best for them is yet to come! ☪

**Jeb Egbert** has focused on youth ministry and education for 30 years. He has spent considerable time working in camp ministry and has taught at the secondary and post-secondary levels. He earned his Doctorate in Education from Texas A & M. He is currently the Vice President of Academic Affairs for Argosy University in Southern California.



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