

Positive Parenting
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LOVE, BRIDGING ACROSS THE MILES

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three: but the greatest of these is love.
1 Corinthians 13:13

For our family, it happened this summer, as a white minivan, carrying our son and daughter-in-law and all three of our grandchildren pulled out of our driveway, beginning their move to the northwest corner of Montana, 1300 miles away. Geographic distance opened between our formerly physically, as well as emotionally close, family. We knew what would bridge the miles between us ... love.

For some of you, miles may open between those children you love when they move out of town, when they leave to go to college or a new job or military training, when they now live in two different households, when they travel for an extended period of time. In some families, it may be a parent who leaves to work remotely, do training, serve in the military, or be called to a distant place for a variety of reasons.

Whatever the reason, it is hard to lose that physical proximity that makes it so easy to weave lives together on a regular basis. I was spoiled, used to having our adult children and our grandchildren close. Les and I loved being an extra set of hands or wheels or providing the gathering place for time together. We savored every moment of that closeness.

I do know that many of you have not enjoyed the luxury of living close to the children you love. For some of you, the distance is much greater. For some, the cost of getting together is prohibitive. For some, the distance is emotional, even if they live in town.

When we knew they would be moving, we started collecting ideas from devoted parents and grandparents, who have learned to bridge the distance with love. Here is some of their best wisdom:

- When you are together, make memories. Store up the cherished times you will savor, even when you are apart. Be joyously present with one another.

- Connect electronically - Skype, FaceTime, Facebook, and email.
- Call them on the phone. Plan to listen, as well as talk. Ask open ended questions, the ones they cannot answer with just one word. Some parents and grandparents schedule regular times to call.
- Send letters ... yes, the ones with stamps on them! Describe your life. Include photos.
- Send care packages, with necessities and their favorite little things.
- For no event or reason, send a small gift that supports their interests.
- Draw pictures for one another.
- Record yourself reading a favorite book or a new book, and send the book along, too.
- Be silly. A cherished friend cut out paper snowflakes to send from Minnesota to his grandchildren in Florida ... and told them to keep them in the freezer!
- Plan to see one another as regularly as you can manage ... and enjoy the anticipation.
- Continue to talk about the ones no longer present face-to-face. Keep their pictures out. Tell stories. Pray for them.
- Remember God's promise that "Love never ends."

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Collect photos of those not living with you or near to you. Display them prominently. Talk about them and pray for them.
2. Send notes, cards, or postcards - yes, by postal mail. Kids love getting "real" mail.
3. Give gifts that keep on giving, like family memberships or passes to local landmarks in their area, tickets for events they would enjoy, lessons or camp or experiences that support their interests.

4. Plan for the next time you will be together. In your area, plan to revisit your favorite spots or do your cherished traditions. When you go to them, plan to visit their schools and favorite haunts. Let them be your guides.
5. Pray for them ... and with them. Ask them what you can pray about for them.