

Retiring Right

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Retiree Edition

OPERS
newsletter

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Connecting with Grandchildren

Grandparents often have the benefit of interacting with children on a level that is removed from the day-to-day responsibilities of parents. This can make it easier to forge a close relationship with grandchildren and provide continuity. Also, contact with grandparents can teach children positive attitudes towards older adults.

The best grandparenting activities flow naturally from the interests of both the grandparents and the grandchildren. You can create a deep, loving relationship with them by sharing the things you love and by being available to hear about the things that interest them. Some ideas for spending time with your grandchildren and making that "connection" are:

- **Share your interests:** Engaging in hobbies and activities that you love or your grandchild loves can be a way to spend time together and learn about each other. They may surprise you with their interest in some of

your interests like knitting or gardening. Similarly, if you take an interest in something they are passionate about, like a TV show or the Harry Potter book series, they may open up in a new way because they get to share their special area of knowledge.

- **Take it easy together:** Enjoy leisure time with your grandchildren. You get to interact with them without the same daily pressures of a parent. Allow yourself to slow down and become really absorbed in an activity. Moving at a slower pace allows your grandchildren to interact with you without feeling rushed.
- **One at a time:** On occasion, spend time with individual grandchildren. It will give you an opportunity to bond without competition.



The Director's Corner

by Tom Spencer,
OPERS Executive Director

SAVE SAVE SAVE

SAVE! Do I have your attention? Good. The United States is widely recognized as the richest country in the world. We have an amazing array of natural resources in this country and our economy has generally been

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the model for other countries to follow. Why then, in this land of plenty, do Americans save at far lower rates than the citizens of countries throughout the industrialized world? The average American currently saves a measly 1.2% of his or her disposable income, which is down from 9% back in the 1980's. Compare those rates with the current rates for Japan at 6.2%, the United Kingdom at 5.6% and Germany at 10.9%. The U.S. has become the largest debtor nation in the world with our government and our citizens borrowing at a breakneck pace. The average American household owes \$18,654 in consumer debt which does not include mortgage debt. The consumer debt number includes an average of \$8,000 per household in credit card debt. Our national debt now stands at \$7.7 trillion which is double what it was in 1991. That is the equivalent of \$72,642 per American household. Why are we saving less and borrowing more? The short and cynical answer is that we have become brainwashed into wanting everything now, even if we have to borrow to get it. Saving isn't on anyone's radar screen because if we save, we can't afford the big house and the latest model car. Instant gratification is all important.

Something's got to give. We are literally consuming our next generations' hopes, dreams and assets. Fortunately, state employees have a couple of great ways to break this cycle and become diligent savers. First there is SoonerSave and the Savings Incentive Plan. State employees can get a \$25 match from the State just by getting in SoonerSave and putting in \$25. Where else can you get 100% return on your money? Every state employee should do at least that much if not more. SoonerSave has a wide array of investments including secure savings accounts and the Stable Value option, as well as several great mutual fund options. Every cent you save through SoonerSave, as well as any earnings, is tax deferred. This means you

don't pay tax until you withdraw your money in the future, typically at retirement. SoonerSave allows you to have a lower tax burden now and more money for retirement. Go to www.SoonerSave.com for more information.

Another savings program available to state employees, state retirees and all Oklahoma citizens is the Oklahoma College Savings Plan. It's another way to save that has several tax advantages such as a dollar for dollar tax credit on state income tax up to \$2,500 per account per taxpayer. On federal income taxes, an account holder doesn't pay tax on their account earnings either. Parents, grandparents and others can set up accounts for our young people to pay for that all important college education. Go to www.ok4saving.com for information on that program.

- **Go outside:** Children love the outdoors, and it can provide adventures and take away distractions such as the TV and the telephone. As the weather warms, water activities can score big points with grandchildren.
- **Play games:** Board and card games are a great opportunity to learn about the kids' personalities. Games also allow you to help your grandchild learn to be a good sport and play fairly.
- **Take a trip:** Sharing your love of a favorite place will help you create special memories with your grandchildren. You can take fun photos of you and your grandchildren and frame them as gifts for their rooms, to keep the memories close and strengthen the bond.
- **Communicate family history:** Tell stories about experiences you shared when their parents were young, such as games or trips. This is a great way to weave a tapestry of shared experiences and add a rich sense of family tradition to a child's life.

Long Distance Grandparenting: Connecting from a Distance.

If you live far from your grandchildren, you may search for ways to be in their lives and create a close connection. Making a real effort to reach out across the miles will reap rewards.

When you're talking to your grandchildren, make notes about things like their pets' names, books they're reading, teacher's name - anything you can repeat in the next conversation so they know you've been listening. At a very young age, most children can recognize their name on an envelope, and will love the feeling of importance when they receive mail. For younger children, you can record yourself reading a few of your favorite children's books and send the tape along with the books. These small things communicate your interest and love and will shorten the "warm up" period when you do have the opportunity to see them in person.

For the computer-savvy, the Internet can add a new dimension to long-distance grandparenting. Your grandchildren can share their favorite websites, and you can email each other photographs, jokes, etc. You can use instant messaging programs with them or maybe even set up a "chat date."

Address Change Alert!

Have you had a recent address change due to the implementation of an emergency response system in your area? Even if you have not moved, your address may have changed for this reason. Please send your new address information to us at: OPERS, P.O. Box 53007, Oklahoma City, OK 73152. Include your Social Security number and original signature. You can also download our Change of Address form at www.opers.state.ok.us/forms.

Durable Power of Attorney

There are occasions when OPERS members become incapacitated or are unable to make decisions for themselves - sometimes with little or no warning. Over the years, our staff has seen the following scenarios occur when members have made no provision for incapacity:

- A retiree is moved to a nursing home or hospital and is not able to complete the document to reroute his benefit check;
- A member is eligible to retire, but is incapable of completing an application;
- A member's beneficiary dies and the member is unable to designate another person.

Some members avoid situations like these by executing a durable power of attorney. This is a legal instrument that is used to delegate legal authority to another person. It is effective until your death, or until you revoke it.

"Legally, OPERS cannot allow a family member to act on a member's behalf unless legal provisions have been made for it, such as a durable power of attorney, legal guardianship, etc.," said Joe Fox, OPERS General Counsel. "We encourage members to plan ahead and allow for the unexpected."

A durable power of attorney is a simple and inexpensive way to plan ahead and choose who will handle your affairs in a difficult situation. If you do not have one, others may have to go to court to get the legal right to manage your affairs - and this may leave you vulnerable to bad decisions or even exploitation. It is sometimes difficult to consider the possibility of becoming incapacitated, but having a plan in place can keep a bad situation from getting worse.

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