



Playdatebox

MAY 2024

GARDENS

PLAYDATEBOX.COM NEWSLETTER



HOW TO BUILD A PLAYDATEBOX

Choose 1 picture book



Choose 1 hands-on activity



Choose 1 question



Gather supplies in advance for instant fun with the grandkids

Play together in person or via videoconference

HOW IT WORKS

SELF-CARE FOR GRANDPARENTS AND KIDS WHO LOVE THEM

The Gardens Playdatebox is a themed box of fun designed to get you and a child you love playing together.

The goal of this box is to help grandparents, parents, and grandchildren create connections in playful ways, regardless of distance.

Choose one book, one activity, and one "connection question" that are age-appropriate for your child or grandchild, gather your supplies, and start playing! Please share these play ideas with friends and family and visit [Playdatebox.com](https://www.playdatebox.com) for more ideas!



WHAT'S IN GRANDMA NAE'S PLAYDATEBOX?



Here's what I currently have in my Gardening Playdatebox. You might choose different items for yours...

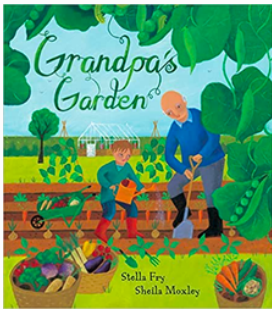


Flowerpot Painting Supplies

Inexpensive dollar store pots and some good washable paint are a fun long-distance craft project.

Zinnia Seeds, Potting Soil

Zinnias are my favorite seeds for kids' gardening. They sprout quickly, are so easy to care for, and the blooms are truly stunning.



Favorite Children's Books about Gardens

There are so many beautiful options!

Photosensitive Paper

Go on a field trip to find plants with interesting foliage and then make sunprints by exposing the paper to the sun.



Child-Sized Garden Tools

Gloves and a few tools for digging will open a child's eyes to the wonder of the earth and soil.

Building Your Own Playdatebox...

For "local" grandkids, I store a plastic tote with the above supplies so I'm ready to play at a moment's notice. For long-distance grandkids, I ship play supplies via Amazon, Walmart delivery, or snail mail. We use Zoom to play together just like we would if we could be together in-person!



LONG-DISTANCE AND REMOTE PLAYDATE

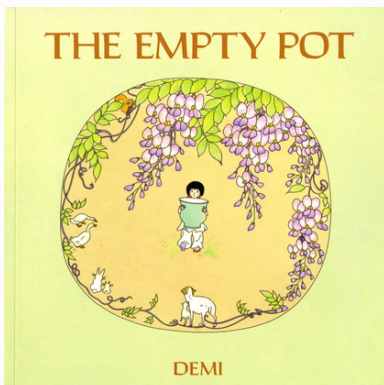
GARDENING FROM A DISTANCE

Yes, it's possible to garden with grandchildren long-distance! You will just need to use a little imagination.

Read books about gardening together:

I use lots of different strategies when I'm online with far-away grandkids. Long-distance playdates have challenges, but they are very rewarding!

For your next Zoom call, you might enjoy sharing your screen and enjoying the story of ***The Empty Pot*** written and illustrated by Demi and read by Rami Malek on [the StorylineOnline YouTube Channel](#). You listen in as a professional actor does the reading. Or, mute the sound and read it yourself!

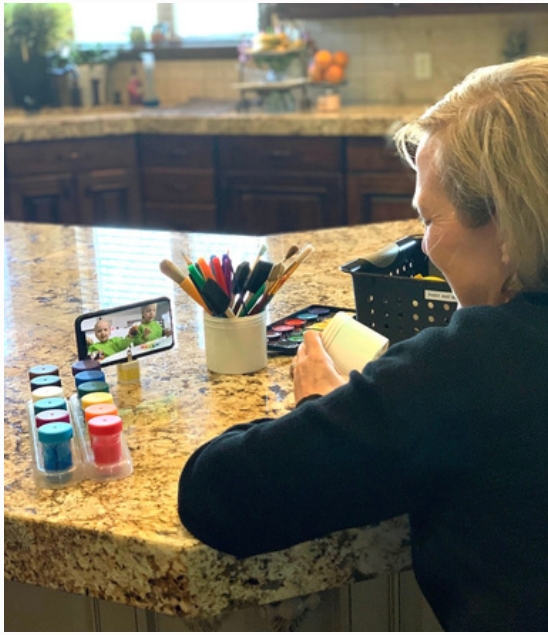


Readeo.com

If you love reading remotely, try a "BookChat"

Readeo.com allows you to select a book online from hundreds of titles. You and your book buddy will be connected via videochat, so you can both see and hear one another AND see the full book on your screen. This allows you to read together as if in the same room!





HANDS-ON REMOTE GARDENING

PAINT A FLOWERPOT, PLANT SEEDS, HAVE A GROWING CONTEST

Very simple hands-on projects are my favorite part of online playdates. I make sure I have supplies on my end of the call so I can duplicate the project the kids are doing.

This project takes a little more patience, and a willing adult on the other end of the call, but we have successfully painted flowerpots via remote call.

In addition to a favorite children's book about gardening, ship an [inexpensive flower pot](#), some [washable paints](#), and a [paintbrush](#) to your grandchild. Meanwhile, schedule a date when parents can be nearby to help. I include a package of [Zinnia seeds](#), and a little bag of [potting soil](#) (enough to fill the pot) in the Playdatebox I ship. During our scheduled online playdate, we will paint our pots together via FaceTime or Zoom call. On a second call, after our paint has had time to dry, we'll plant seeds into our pots and then compare over time to see whose plant sprouts soonest.

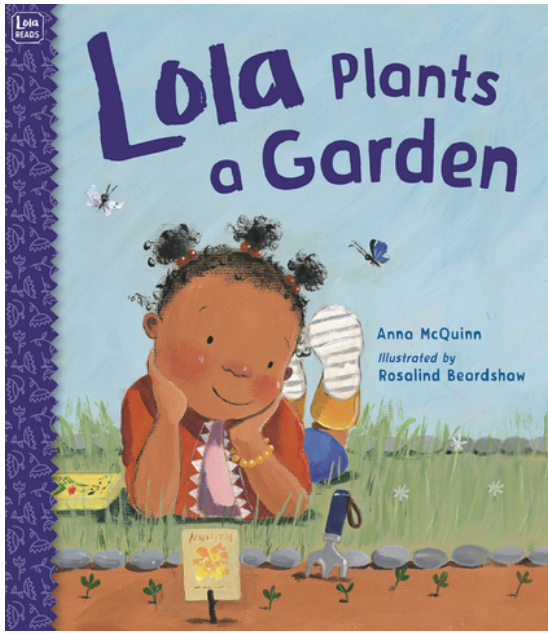
You can download a free "Zinnia Tracking Sheet" and compare progress.

Note: Whenever possible, I ask my adult children to set up a laptop or desktop computer for our playdates. It's a better experience for the kids if they can see and hear clearly. It's a better experience for me if I can see them clearly too!



Look closely and you'll see that I'm using the plug end of my phone charger as a phone tripod while I paint so the kids can see my work.

This works to help hold a phone still if you can't access a laptop.



AGES 2-5

A BOOK, AN ACTIVITY, A QUESTION

Book: Lola Plants a Garden:

Lola is curious about what makes plants grow, so she and her mom visit the library to find out. She decides to plant a garden of her own and invites all of her friends to share her harvest. [Preview the book here on YouTube.](#)

Activity:

Paint a simple flowerpot together. Or, tear up colorful paper napkins and mod-podge them onto a terra cotta pot. Once your design is complete, paint the entire pot once with mod podge and let it dry. Find Instructions here: <https://www.onsuttonplace.com/diy-mod-podge-terra-cotta-pots/>

Question: *Who taught you about gardens?*

We happen to have *many* grandmas in our family who love gardening. One of them was even named Lola! Each of our grandchildren receive a copy of "Lola Plants a Garden" with a photo of our Grandma Lola pasted on the inside cover and a short story about her. We let the kids ask us questions about Grandma Lola.

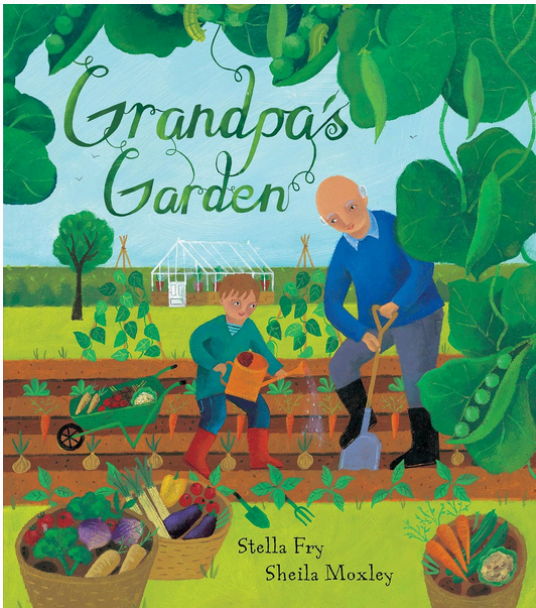
What memories do you have of gardening that you could share?



Mod Podge Flowerpots - colorful strips of paper napkin make this an easy craft.

AGES 5-7

A BOOK, AN ACTIVITY, A QUESTION



The Book:

One of my favorite gardening books, *Grandpa's Garden* follows a grandfather and grandson through an entire season of gardening together. The end matter at the back of the book teaches some basic gardening principles by season and may give you ideas to try. We started composting our kitchen scraps after reading this book together!

The Activity:

Plant something together! There's something special about working with a child to put plants or seeds into the soil and watch them grow! There's no better metaphor for the relationship you are trying to develop with your Playdates!

Research tells us that next to therapy and journaling, gardening is one of the best forms of self-therapy.

Favorite activities for grandkids who can't access a plot of land:

- Plant a small container garden. Purchase a few blooming flowers and plant them in a pot your grandchild will care for.
- Grow some culinary herbs like basil, oregano, or mint for your kitchen.
- Make a picnic and purchase foods you might grow in a typical garden. Take a blanket to the park and sit under the trees to enjoy it. Snap peas, cherry tomatoes, and strawberries, are all things you might find in a typical garden.
- Dream up a Grandkids' Garden. Have the kids help you choose what to put into a garden at *your* home that is just for them. The hollyhock garden above was planted by one of my friends who designed it as an outdoor playhouse for her grandchildren.

The Question:

If you could grow one thing that you could eat every day, what would it be?



#PlayLibrary

Kids' Garden Set

Garden tools for children are the kind of childhood plaything you don't think of as toys until the day you are wise enough to invest in some. If you happen to be a gardener, you'll completely understand how necessary a set of kid's gloves, a watering can, and some tools for mucking around in the dirt can be.

But if you aren't a gardener, you may still want to invest, particularly if you happen to have a play space that features bare dirt or you want to get your grandchildren away from their screens for a while.

- Child-sized trowel, spade, rake
- Kids' gardening gloves
- A watering can
- A bucket or bag for carrying tools
- Access to a hose – a spray nozzle with a trigger a child can manage is an extra bonus for a preschooler
- An assortment of old pots for painting and planting

Help a child you love to develop an appreciation for plants, bugs, and the world around them. This is a wonderful open-ended toy!

A SET OF KID'S GARDENING TOOLS IS A GREAT THING TO HAVE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD TOYBOX.

THEY ALSO MAKE A GREAT BIRTHDAY GIFT!

Plant Remotely:

Send Seeds to a Buddy

Try designing your own seed packets using just a piece of paper, or order plain seed packets online and decorate them yourself. Once your seed packet is ready to go, ship some seeds to a buddy and then have a growing contest.

This activity is particularly fun if you are gardening "remotely" with your Playdatebox Buddy.





FREE PRINTABLE

DOWNLOAD A ZINNIA
TRACKING SHEET SO YOU
AND YOUR GARDENING
BUDDY CAN PLANT
ZINNIAS
SIMULTANEOUSLY.

WATCH HOW THE
GROWTH OF YOUR
PLANTS IS THE SAME OR
DIFFERENT.

Easy-to-Grow Seeds

PLANT SOME SEEDS IN YOUR POT

Once your decorate pot is dry, you'll be able to plant a few seeds and learn about soil, water, and light and how they impact growing seeds. Share photos regularly as your plants grow. Gardening with grandchildren can happen even if you live miles apart!

Consider beginning with seeds that grow quickly. Beans, Zinnias, and Radishes are all great options. If you try Zinnias, be sure to download the Zinnia Tracking Sheet so you can compare progress.



FUN WITH FOLIAGE

SCIENCE WITH SUN-SENSITIVE PAPER

Sun-sensitive paper is a really fun tool to use for creating interesting shapes and textures on paper. Go on a treasure hunt to find leaves and blossoms that have some interesting shapes. Place your samples on the paper in direct sunlight, weigh them down with a clear acrylic sheet, and wait a few minutes.

Sun-sensitive paper is a little bit like old-fashioned photo paper in that it leaves a "negative" of the shape of the plant. You wait for the paper to go completely white around the outside edges of the leaves and plants, and then soak the paper in water to change the colors yet again. The whole process is kind of magical for a child. You'll find detailed instructions on our blog.

Once your paper is finished, you can turn it into unique artwork. Or, make a greeting card out of your paper, write a note, and send it to someone you love.

How to Do This Remotely:

Go on a Nature Walk together using FaceTime or Google Duo. Or, ship sun-sensitive paper to both locations and try this science project simultaneously.

Tips For Virtual Storytime

Find some easy ideas ideas for reading aloud via FaceTime or VideoConference on our blog.

- Learn easy ways to maneuver the book and the computer so kids can see the pages more easily.
- Try a couple of fun screen-sharing options that will give you access to professional videography to go along with the story you are reading,
- Try Readeo.com for free. It eliminates much of the frustration you've probably felt when you've tried to do a bedtime story remotely!



GARDEN PLAYDATE, AGES 7–10

A BOOK, AN ACTIVITY, A QUESTION

The book:

The Gardener by Sarah Stewart (Author), David Small (Illustrator)

This beautiful Caldecott winner shows the power of a few small seeds when they are in the hands of an optimist! Lydia Grace Finch moves to the big city during the Great Depression and creates magic. *The Gardener* was the 1997 New York Times Book Review Notable Children's Book of the Year. You will want a copy for your own library!

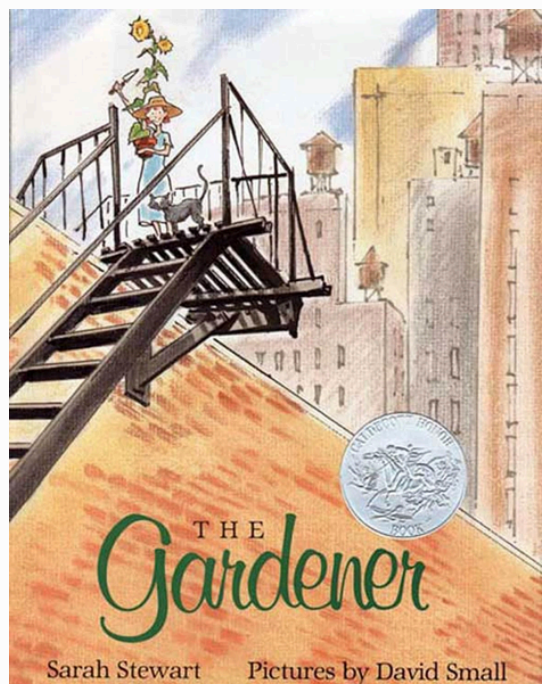
The Activity:

Sprout some seeds and learn some science together. I recently tried a trick I learned on Instagram that showed how to start new pepper plants using seeds from red, yellow, and green peppers from the grocery store.

Just fill a recycled plastic strawberry container with potting soil. Next, they plant the seeds and cover them lightly with soil, keeping the seeds moist until they germinate.

Your germinated seedlings can be moved outdoors when the weather is warm enough.

I tried the same thing with some cherry tomatoes that were in the crisper drawer and looking a little wrinkly. I just squirted out the innards of a cherry tomato into a pot of soil and within a week, I had dozens of new seedlings and we enjoyed cherry tomatoes all summer!



Values to Pass on:

Some Seeds take time. Plant them. Help them Grow.

*Patience. Abundance. How to "start." How to nurture. Life and death, Air, water, soil, and light. A garden is **full** of teaching moments. Growing something with a grandchild will change your life and theirs!*



Gardens (and grandchildren) teach us that nature is abundant and giving. With time, care, and viable seeds, we can grow an abundance of what we need, even though the seeds we started with were very small.

It wasn't until I started gardening with my grandchildren that my small garden started to become a place of wonder and a place to teach and connect in ways that are really important to me. My grandchildren have been right alongside of me to put in the very first seeds each spring, and I make it a point to take them outside when they visit so they can help me harvest the first juicy strawberries. We carve pumpkins they grow. We make salad with the spinach they help snip.

Last week, I visited the grandkids at their home and we painted pots and planted some Zinnia seeds. My granddaughter wanted to take a look twenty minutes later to see whether or not her plant was growing. What a disappointment! But today, a full week later, the first little green shoots are showing. With care, the four or five tiny seeds we planted will yield dozens of colorful flowers. And I'm hoping that the small moments of time I invest with her will yield the same kind of abundance.

My garden is a metaphor for the hope I feel as a grandparent. There is so much potential in the little seeds we are planting together!

Connection Question:

What is something that was really small when you started, and then it started to grow, so you took care of it and it got much bigger and much better?

Connection Questions help create bridges of connection between you and your grandchild. Take turns answering any of these questions, and when possible, record or write down the answers!



Some additional questions:

- What is your favorite thing to eat that is grown in a garden or on a tree?
- Think of a time when you were really discouraged about something, but you just kept trying and eventually, you succeeded!
- What plant in the world grows the biggest, but starts from the smallest seed?
- Are there any seeds in your refrigerator right now that could be planted and have something grow from them? How can we find out?

Something fun to try with Long-Distance Grands:

While you are on a video call with your long-distance grandchildren, Search for "time-lapse seed germination" on YouTube and watch videos of seeds growing, flowers blooming, or fruit and vegetables ripening. It's pretty amazing!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECibetK2EYI>

SOME FUN GRANDPARENT RESOURCES TO TRY...



*Easy & Fun
postcards*



*Grandparenting
Course*



Meaningful ways to
stay connected with
far-away grandkids

*Website You
Will Love*

Silverpost Postcards: You text a photo and a greeting, Silverpost prints and mails a postcard each month. Cost: \$5.00 per month.
<https://www.hello.thesilverpost.com/>

Grandparenting_101 is an online course just for intentional Grandparents. Richard and Linda Eyre will teach the art of developing effective, difference-making relationships with our grandkids.

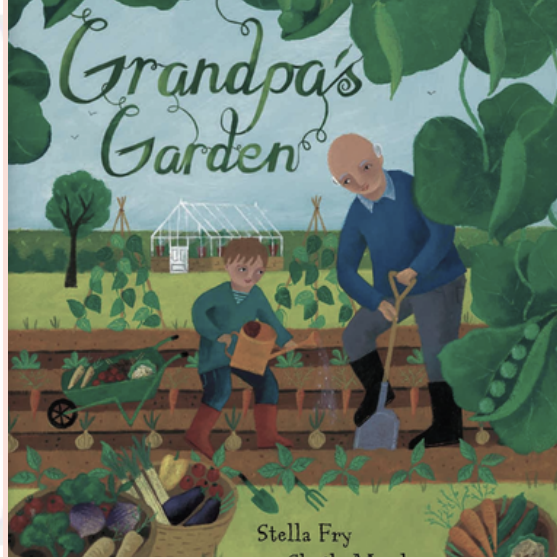
TheLongDistanceGrandparent.com: Kerry Byrne, Ph.D. shares tips and tricks for grandparents who love grandchildren from a distance.



Picture This Plant Identification App

(Requires monthly fee)

My grandkids love to play around with my "Picture This" app. Just snap a photo with the app and learn all about the plant you are looking at. We love to use it to identify cool plants when we travel!



Picture Book: Grandpa's Garden

Ages: 4-7 years

Paperback

This beautifully told story follows Billy from early spring to late summer as he helps his grandpa on his vegetable patch.



Children's Garden Set

Ages: 4-8 years

A sturdy set with a canvas carrying case and a board book on gardening.

Includes garden tools and gloves. Available in several colors.

RESOURCES GALLERY*



Kids' flower pot painting set

Paint the 3 stoneware pots, the stoneware tray, and plant markers, and sow the Marigold, Cosmos, and Zinnia flowers



Indoor Herb Garden for Grandma & Grandpa

Plant culinary herbs along with the grandkids but grow them indoors!

Comes with a fun reclaimed wood box.



Cyanotype SunPrint Paper

Objects that eclipse the sun's light will show up in white, with the rest of the paper turning a vibrant Prussian Blue.



Garden Dramatic Play Set for Toddlers

Develop Imaginative play and social skills. For toddlers ages 2+



Kids' Gardening Tools
Ages: 4-7 years

Choose tools made of durable wood and high quality metal.



Let Love Grow Seed Packets, 100

\$11.99 for 100

Fill with your favorite seeds and mail a packet to a grandchild.

RESOURCES GALLERY*



California Giant Zinnia Seeds

\$3.49

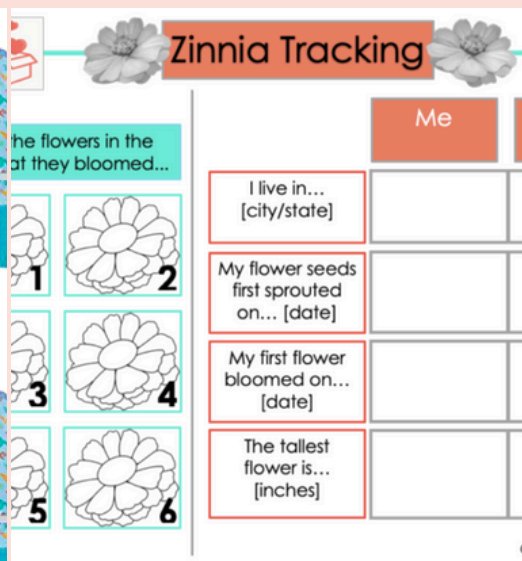
My favorite flower for planting with kids. Easy to grow with big, beautiful blooms that mature in about 50 days!



Kids' Garden Gloves

\$12.99 for 3

The grandkids will get a kick out of planting bedding plants with you, especially if they get their own set of gloves. Comes in 7 colors and patterns.



Zinnia Tracking Sheet

Free Download

Track the growth of your Zinnias across the miles with this free printable.

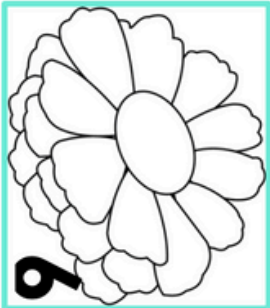
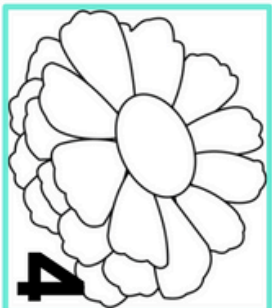
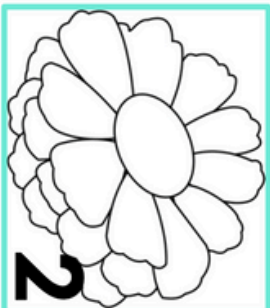
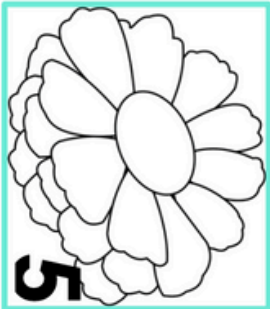
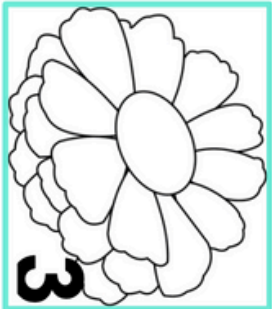
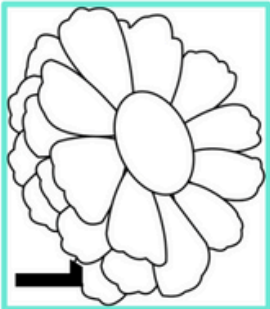
*These links represent ideas for items you may want to include as part of your own gardening Playdate, and I have tested many of them. Listing them here does NOT represent an endorsement from me.



Zinnia Tracking



Color the flowers in the order that they bloomed...



Me

My Playdate
Partner

I live in...
[city/state]

My flower seeds
first sprouted
on... [date]

My first flower
bloomed on...
[date]

The tallest
flower is...
[inches]

FIND MORE FUN IDEAS: [PLAYDATEBOX.COM/GARDENS](https://playdatebox.com/gardens)

SHARE
YOUR
IDEAS!



If you have fun "gardening with grandkids" ideas you would be willing to share with my readers, I want to hear from you!

WE LOVE

- Guest blog posts
- Tips for connecting with long-distance grandchildren
- Fun themes for new Playdateboxes
- Your best Playdate ideas

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photos of play with grandchildren!

