

# Meaningful listening at all ages

## Docia Shares a Story

With so many new experiences to grapple with these days, grandparents may not always make time to listen to what the youngest children are saying. When we make a point to listen and respond we are amazed at the ways young children find to express their thoughts and feelings clearly, even though their vocabularies and concepts are still limited:

"I don't like faces that are cross-ish."

"We eat funny 'cuz my daddy's gaining off weight."

"My mother just cries angry."

"My grandma has a good doctor, but you can't get the number 'cuz she's dead."

"There, there, Honey, I'll be your mother till your mother comes," said a four year old to a two year old.

We tend to think that learning progresses from younger to older, but really growth and development take place at all ages, with each stage informing and influencing the other. Here's an example of younger learning from older:

When five-year-old Nigel returned home from his first day in kindergarten, his grandmother asked him what he had learned. He stood up tall and said in a loud voice:

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic in witches hands, invisible and just as well!"

Nigel's grandma thought this was funny and she laughed, but further conversation revealed a connection with a Halloween story his grandma had read to him the night before, filled with Halloween characters including witches.

Docia Zavitkovsky has furthered the cause of young children as a practitioner in the field for over 50 years and as past president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Known far and wide for her storytelling, she has traveled extensively as an early childhood consultant, lecturer, and adventurer.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JEAN BERLEFEIN

Now here's an example of older learning from younger:

When four-year-old Todd excitedly told his grandfather that he was going on a raptor trip with his dad, his grandfather thought it strange that people were interested in bouncing around on swirling, bumpy, ice cold water in this chilly season. When Todd returned with stories of the eagles and hawks he had seen, his grandfather realized Todd had been talking about a raptor trip, not a rafter trip. Raptor was a new word to him, and he learned it from his four-year-old grandson.

This is surely a time when we need to listen carefully to each other — elders as reservoirs of knowledge, support, encouragement, motivation, and love, and youngsters as springs of new thoughts, ideas, explorations, and discoveries . . . and vice versa! Three cheers for wonderful conversations between grandparents and young children, and really people of all ages!