

# Keeping connected with video chats

Video chats can help keep children and family members connected when there is distance between them. Video chats can give children an opportunity to build relationships, communicate with, and learn from family members on the other side of the screen. Many video chat apps, such as FaceTime, Skype and Zoom are free to use and easy to download to smartphones.

## Tips for supporting children

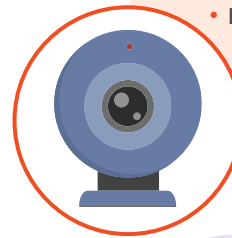
### Choose the best time

- Find a time when your child is most likely to be free and able to focus on the screen.
- Don't pick times when they are hungry or tired.



### Look at the camera

- Eye contact keeps a conversational feel.
- Locate the camera on your screen or computer and look directly at it as much as possible.



### Include sensory prompts

- Help your child to engage their senses – sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch.
- Repeat what you have said and use things they can see on the screen.



### Avoid background distraction

- Sit in a quiet spot with little noise to help your child focus on you.
- Have your mobile phone on silent and turn the TV down before you start.
- You can mute your computer microphone if whenever it gets noisy in the background.



### Match time to attention span

- Take your child's age into account.
- Start with a brief chat and increase time if you find your child can talk for longer without getting tired.
- If not, stick to shorter and more often.
- Be open with family as you all work out what your child can handle so no one is upset or disappointed.



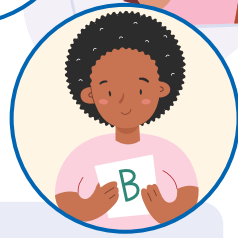
### Promote mobility

- Where possible, use a smartphone, tablet or laptop so you and your child can move around and do a 'show and tell'. This makes video chats more real and interactive.



### Be prepared

- Help your child prepare by thinking about what they can show or talk about with family.
- Ideas include showing school projects, craft hobbies, artworks, reading a storybook or playing a musical instrument.
- Make sure everything your child needs is within reach.



### Use hand gestures

- You may need to exaggerate hand and other non-verbal ways of expressing yourself.
- Use hand gestures like waving and thumbs up.
- Make sure your hand signals are visible on the screen.



### Be consistent

- Young children who do not talk well yet rely on sight and sound to recognise people.
- Use consistent greetings and tone to give them cues that it is you on video chat.



## Tips for adults

## Read a book together

- Encourage the family member to read a story to your child.
- Use picture books and flash cards with infants.
- Ask older children to choose their favourite book and read it over video chat.
- When a child can see they have the same book as the person on the screen it helps them feel connected.
- Storybooks that are relevant to your child and family's culture can develop cultural connections and understanding.



## Have a staring contest

- Both people close their eyes and then open them on the count of three and stare at the screen.
- The first player to blink loses the game. This is a fun game to play together that does not require any equipment.

## Play 'peek a boo'

- Turn camera away from you, then back to your face and say 'peek a boo'.
- Surprise children by putting a toy animal in front of your face.
- Introduce something you would like to talk about when the camera is on you.

## Play music, dance and sing

- People on both ends of the camera can listen to the same song and sing or dance together and join in with their own instruments.
- Use familiar nursery rhymes and the alphabet song with younger children.
- Ask older children to play their favourite song and look up the lyrics so you can sing along or ask them to teach you the latest dance moves such as 'flossing'.
- Family members can teach children songs in their language and/or cultural dances to promote cultural connections for children.



# Fun activities to incorporate into video chats



## Play 'I spy'

- One player chooses an object in sight and says to the other player, "I spy with my little eye, something beginning with..." naming the first letter of the object.
- Children and family members can take turns and give instructions like "look up", "look to the left" to assist the other player to guess the object.

## Share food

- Organise a video chat to coincide with a meal or snack time.
- Organise so the child and family member eat the same food.
- Pretend to feed younger children through the screen.
- Engage older children in a pretend dinner table conversation.



## Use effects, filters and backgrounds

- Create fun effects, filters and backgrounds and show children how to create different effects.
- FaceTime allows you to add effects like 'comic book', 'camcorder' and 'watercolour'.
- You can also add 'Animojis', text and shapes to the video chat.
- Try using a virtual background in Zoom such as a tropical beach scene, the Hogwarts castle from Harry Potter or a place of cultural significance.

## Share jokes

- Incorporate humour into your video chats to keep the conversation light-hearted.
- Share a joke or show a funny meme.
- Have a new joke or two each time.

## Resources and useful links

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/tips-video-chatting-young-children>  
<http://babyation.com/5-video-chatting-tips-babies-toddlers/>  
<https://www.univision.com/papas-y-mamas-en/technology/10-activities-to-make-family-video-calls-fun-for-kids>  
<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/61888/11-tricks-making-video-chats-friends-more-fun-and-immersive>  
<https://www.alifeoverseas.com/8-tips-for-keeping-kids-engaged-during-phone-or-video-calls/>  
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2535-five-tips-to-make-the-most-of-video-chats>  
<https://adventuresinnanaland.com/fun-games-to-play-over-skype/>

## For more information

Research Centre for Children and Families,  
Sydney School of Education and Social Work  
e [rccf.research@sydney.edu.au](mailto:rccf.research@sydney.edu.au)  
w [sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups/research-centre-for-children-and-families.html](https://sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups/research-centre-for-children-and-families.html)

Developed as part of the ARC Linkage project Fostering Lifelong Connections for Children in Permanent Care (LP180101332).



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