



Video Visits with Children

Video visits can be an important way for children to stay connected with their parent or caregiver when they can't be together in person. These visits promote bonding, learning, language development and social skills. Even very young children can benefit from an interactive video visit.

Sometimes, however, it may seem like your child isn't interested or doesn't respond the way you expect. While this can be frustrating, it is also normal. **Here are some tips to help video visits go smoothly.**

Prepare

If you are the caregiver at home, schedule visits when you can help your child without distraction. If you are the parent away, ask for the visit at a time convenient for the caregiver. Let your child know what will happen during the visit and what it will look like.

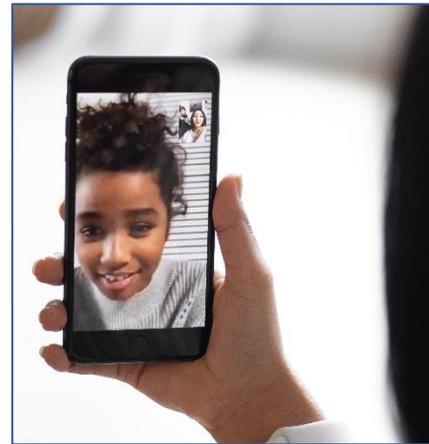
First visits may be awkward

Be patient. If your child hasn't video chatted with their loved one before, it may take a few times before they are comfortable.

Keep it child-focused

A video visit can be a special time for parent and child. If adults need time to visit or if they have business to discuss, consider setting a different time for that or divide the visit so that there is child-centered time.

Any discussions that involve upset feelings between adults should happen when the child is not present.



Expect behavior changes

Children sometimes feel upset when they see loved ones but can't be with them in person. These feelings may show up in different ways, from clinging and whining, to walking away, silly behavior or acting out. This does not mean video visiting isn't good for your child.

Expect these behaviors. Stay calm and manage your own feelings during visits. This can help your children manage their feelings as well.

Accept feelings

Your child may feel all sort of emotions—positive and negative. It's important for children know they can talk about their feelings, even the difficult ones. If you notice strong emotions, use this as an opportunity to connect: "It looks like you're feeling sad today..." (or angry or silly or happy) "tell me about that." "What could you do to feel better?" (or "What can you to keep feeling happy?")

Plan for talk and play

If you are the parent away, plan some age-appropriate activities you can try together. For older children, think of topics to discuss. (See Conversation Starters, right.) Here are ideas.

- Babies – Read a book, play peek-a-boo or quietly sing a favorite song or nursery rhyme.
- Younger children – Read a book, tell a story or poem. Play a game like I-Spy or Would You Rather. Remember, attention spans can be short.
- Older children – Talk about school, sports or activities they like. Share stories about your childhood or about things that make you happy. Tell a joke or funny story, or talk about something interesting you read or saw.
- Questions can be great conversation starters but don't rely too much on questions. Kids may not feel like answering questions and can feel uncomfortable if that's all there is to a conversation. Instead, make sure you have something you can share.

Keep it positive

Children who are separated from their parents have their own burdens. Don't add to them by sharing your own. This can increase their stress. Try to find some positive topics to discuss. Even small, happy things can spark hope.

Sources:

[Planning for a Visit with Your Child/Children](#) Youth.gov

[Successful Video Visits with Young Children](#) National Council on Crime and Delinquency

[Tips for Video Chatting with Young Children—Staying connected while far apart.](#) National Association for the Education of Young Children

[Five Tips to Make the Most Out of Video Chats](#) Zero to Three

Conversation starters to try

What are three good things that happened this week?

I read about something funny today (or I saw something funny on TV)...

What is your favorite thing about yourself? My favorite thing about myself is...

What have you done this week that makes you proud?

My favorite teacher when I was your age was...

Who is the kindest person you know?

What is your favorite animal? Mine is...because...

Goodbyes can be hard

Prepare *before* the visit to help your child cope when it's time to say goodbye. Let your child know how long the visit will last. For young children, give a frame of reference like "The visit will last as long as.... (insert a time period the child knows, like a favorite program or the time it takes you to walk to the park)." Give your child a heads-up a few minutes before the visit ends with similar language.

How caregivers can help

Caregivers at home can provide a calm, quiet place for the child to video visit. For young children, you may want to cuddle your child while they interact with the loved one who is away. Help your child feel the love. If the loved one on screen blows a kiss, kiss your child. If they play pat-a-cake, help the child clap. When they send a hug, give your child a squeeze.

When a parent is away, video visits can help your child feel loved and connected. They also show a child that their loved one is ok. Don't expect an immediate connection. With patience your child will treasure this time.