Video chatting: a guide for parents and carers of primary school-age children

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Video-chatting services have soared in popularity during the COVID-19 epidemic, and with good reason: they offer an easy way to keep in touch with friends, family and workmates.

From IMO, WeChat, and Houseparty to Zoom, Skype and FaceTime, there are many video-chatting apps and websites. All let you have a real-time conversation over the internet using a camera, and most cater for both large groups and one-on-one chats.

Primary-aged children might not previously have had much experience with these apps, but may well be using them now for education or to speak to their friends. (*Note: we also have a [guide for the parents/carers of secondary-aged children](#).*)

So what do parents and carers need to know about these services? Here's our guide to making sure that your child's video-chatting experience is safe and fun.

Video chatting can be positive for young children

Young children who are used to chatting, playing and learning with their friends in school are now having to stay indoors with their families. This can be difficult for them and many will be relying on phones, tablets, laptops and games consoles for entertainment and to stay in touch with their friends.

Talking to friends via video-chat can be an excellent way for them to stay cheerful and is good for social development.

Plus, with many video-chatting apps now offering filters, quizzes and games, they can be a great source of entertainment for young children.

Decide which apps are suitable for your child

All video apps and sites are different, so it's worth doing some research before deciding which one to set your children up on. It's probably worth talking to the parents of their friends, so you can jointly agree.

Some are better suited to older children or adults, some are designed more for remote working, and others offer features aimed specifically at younger kids.

Don't forget the security side of things. Have a look at the privacy settings – is there a recommended minimum age? Can you disable location settings?

Some apps can connect users to strangers through features such as a 'big chat', while others can connect you to friends of friends.

Be sure to explore appropriate apps together and always be on hand to supervise your child while they are video-chatting.

Talk to your child about how they should use these apps, and make agreements together. You could do a Thinkuknow **#OnlineSafetyAtHome activity worksheet** together, to help them explore some of the issues in an enjoyable way.

Always let your child know that they can talk to you or another adult they trust at any time – and that you'll never blame them for anything that happens to them online.

Be safety-conscious

Lots of children will only use video-chatting services for conversations with friends and family members, but some apps make it easy for them to speak with people they don't know – and it's possible, though rare, that they might come into contact with an adult who doesn't have their best interests at heart.

To help your child have safe online conversations with people they know, agree on some family boundaries, such as when and where they will use video-chat and who they can speak to.

Build your child's resilience

We know that people can behave differently online – adults and children alike. Young children feel that it's not 'real life' on video chats. They may feel pressure to impress their friends, to gain followers, or to copy other people.

Let your child know that it's never OK for people to say nasty things via video chat, nor to pressure anyone into doing something they don't want to do. Reassure your child that they can always say no and end the video and speak to you or another adult they trust.

Know how to get help if you need it

The vast majority of all video chats will be entirely safe and uneventful. Your child will probably spend most of them talking nonsense with their friends, like they do in the playground.

Very occasionally, though, you might need help dealing with a serious problem.

The video-chatting app's privacy settings will have information on how to block and report users who are not known to your child, so it's worth familiarising yourself with these pages.

Parent Zone offers guides to the key features of many popular apps and games, including the currently very popular **Houseparty** and **Zoom**. The **NSPCC's Net Aware** site does a similar job. Remind your child that they can always speak to someone at Childline if something is worrying or upsetting them. Childline can be contacted via a call or online chat confidentially, about anything: 0800 1111 or **www.childline.org.uk**.
You or your child can also make a report to CEOP (**www.ceop.police.uk**). CEOP is a law enforcement agency that works to keep children and young people safe from sexual abuse and grooming online - and you or your child can make a report if you're worried about something that's happened when talking to someone online. This may

include being asked to meet face-to-face or being pressured into doing something they feel uncomfortable with.

After making a report, you and/or your child will receive support from a specialist Child Protection Advisor.