



CLARECARE

CLARECARE ADVOCACY
SERVICE FOR PARENTS
OF CHILDREN IN CARE



**USING
TECHNOLOGY
TO CREATE POSITIVE
CONNECTIONS
WITH YOUR
CHILD IN CARE**

Supporting positive contact with children through technology

A new way to connect with your child

Clarecare Advocacy Service provides support to parents of children in care. It is a support service for parents of children in the care of Tusla in the Clare area, be it foster care, relative care or residential care.

Parents we work with have adapted to video calls as a new way of connecting with their children. These parents have contributed to the development of this booklet. Their ideas and tips are very useful and may help you to make the contact with your child in care as positive as possible.

We hope that by supporting positive contact with your child through technology, this will help maintain a real connection for both of you.

Technology offers a chance for your two worlds to connect.

This booklet has lots of ideas on how to prepare for a call and how to make the most of the time you have with your child.

WHAT PARENTS SAY

“Lovely to see him on his birthday. Great to be part of his day.”

Creating Positive contact for you and your child

Using technology is a positive way of feeling connected to your child/children.

Advantages

- A chance to share moments in life, such as talking about the school day or birthdays. These moments build into shared memories of time spent together.
- Children get to see their parent and start looking forward to these important times with their parents.
- A chance for you to see where your child is living and for children to see where their parents live.
- No travel.

Challenges

- No hugs or kisses but you do get to see and hear how your child is doing.
- Technology can sometimes let you down. The signal might be bad but don't be hard on yourself if technology fails, it happens to all of us.
- Not everyone has a smart phone, internet connections or the relevant apps downloaded, so maybe check this out ahead of time.
- It can be hard to engage with your child if you, or your child, are having a bad day or just aren't in the mood for a chat. This is very normal and, on these days, just let them know you are there for them - maybe send a text instead. The important thing is they know you called and are thinking about them.
- Sometimes calls can be short but that's ok as you are still letting your child know you are there and that you care. Don't forget there will be other days to create a closer relationship with your child.



What helps

Written Agreement

Using technology can be difficult for most people and takes time and preparation. You will need to carefully plan and agree with everyone involved which days suit best, how long the call should be and who is taking part. A written agreement is a great idea. It is important to think about keeping everyone safe and there should be some safety tips in the written agreement. A written agreement between everyone involved in setting up the video calls means no-one is left with any questions about what it involves. You, your child, their Foster Carers and Social Worker need to work together to create a written agreement as part of the access or contact plan.

Written Agreement – Things to consider

- How often to call? How long should the call last and what time suits best?
- Who makes the call?
- What platform is used to make the call? For example, WhatsApp.
- Where will the calls be made? For example, what room will you be in when you make the call?
- Who will be present for the calls? Will there be interruptions?
- What is the plan if someone gets upset and hangs up?
- How will any language barriers be managed?
- What if someone is shy and there is lots of silence?
- How will you plan what to do during the call?
- What, if any, information can be shared after the call?

Safety points

- Calls should not be recorded.
- Stop and think before sharing images of your child. Always ask yourself ‘how am I protecting his/her privacy?’

WHAT PARENTS SAY

“Remember it’s not just for me...it’s great for the child to be able to see their parent.”



Making the call

It is important to take care of yourself so you can be fully present with your child.

These are good ideas even if you, or your child, are not feeling the best.

Before the call

- It is normal to feel nervous before a call.
- Read the written agreement as a reminder of what's involved.
- Remember that every call will be different and that is okay.
- Look after yourself before the call. Go for a walk, have a chat with a friend, listen to some music.
- Think about what you would like to chat to your child about, maybe write down a few things. Have a look at the suggested questions on page 5.
- Your child might ask to see around your home so make sure you are happy to show it off. If this isn't possible what could you say to prevent your child's disappointment or upset?
- Model self-care for your child by having yourself presentable to the outside world.
- Make sure there are no distractions around you.
- Be aware of who could enter the room unplanned during the call.
- Think about any difficult questions and have your 'story' ready.
- It may help to have a plan for what you can do together and chat about on the call.
- If you or your child are naturally quiet, or you find talking on the phone difficult then it is important to have things to show or do during access.
- Think about what you will say if you aren't able to continue the call. You could say something like 'I am not feeling very well today so I will have to go soon'.
- Sometimes it can be difficult to hear or understand people on the phone, be ready for this by knowing how to adjust the volume on your phone and by speaking slowly and clearly yourself.

During the phone call

Sometimes it can be hard to know where to start. Saying 'hi, it's great to see you' is always a nice way to start a chat.

- Ask your child what they would like to do, talk about, or show you.
- Be the best listener. Children know when you're really listening. Try 'Tell me the best part of your day' or 'Tell me more about that'. Try not to give any advice or ask too many questions.
- Talk about things you know your child is interested in such as sport, TV or books.
- Use anything your child shows you as a way to start a conversation such as, their favourite toy or a drawing.
- Silence is sometimes okay on the phone. Some activities such as colouring together may involve some silence.
- Praise your child as often as you can.
- Be positive about what your child shows you.
- If there are any special occasions such as your child's birthday think about making a birthday card, or a banner, to show to your child.
- Have photographs of your child in your home, which you can show them during the call.
- If you have pets, you can talk about them.
- If you can, let them know when you will next talk to them before ending the call.
- End the call on a positive note - kisses and hugs over the phone can be fun! Making a heart sign with your hands is always a nice gesture.



WHAT PARENTS SAY

"They were excited to show me their school work."

Afterwards

- Recognise your feelings and give yourself some time to think.
- Think about what went really well and what you might change next time. Write down any ideas that come to you.
- Contact your child's Social Worker if you have any questions about your child.
- Start planning for the next call.



Some ideas to help the chat go well

Good questions to ask

- What new thing did you learn today?
- What was your favourite part of today?
- What was the hardest part of today?
- What are you good at doing?
- Did you do anything kind for someone today? What?
- Where is the coolest place you have ever been?
- If you could be invisible for a day what would you do?

Good questions to ask young children

- What did you eat for lunch today?
- What was the best thing that happened today?
- What was the funniest thing that happened today?
- What made you feel happy today?
- Did anything make you feel sad today? What?
- Did anyone do something nice for you today?

Sing your child's favourite nursery song.

If your child is a toddler

Time your chat. Mornings are always better for young children. Use eye contact to connect and sit close to your screen so they can see your whole face. Eye contact keeps attention and interest. Try mirroring funny faces and playing peek-a-boo.

Plan ahead so your toddler is not waiting. It can take time to sort out problems with sound, video, or connection issues. Weekends might be best when foster carers are home and have more time. Don't be surprised if your child hangs up by mistake—that red button is tempting to young kids!

Lower your expectations. Toddler attention spans are short. A successful call may be five minutes or less. Asking questions and interviewing won't keep them long. Think of yourself as an entertainer, and enjoy your time on stage!



Older children

Communicating

- Make time to hear about the day's activities.
- Be sure your child knows you're interested and listening carefully.
- Ask questions that go beyond 'yes' or 'no' answers to encourage more conversation.
- Ask questions about your child's interests - sports, hobbies or friends.
- Don't be afraid to talk about yourself to balance the conversation.
- Open up about your day or tell a story from when you were younger.
- Show empathy - If they discuss a problem or difficulty they are having, put yourself in their shoes. Avoid trying to minimise their difficulty or problem solve, which as parents we want to do. Instead, make them feel listened to by saying 'That sounds really difficult' or 'It sounds like there's a lot going on'.

WHAT PARENTS SAY
"I'm able to give all the children individual time..."

Some questions to start a conversation

1. What are you looking forward to?
2. What was the funniest, weirdest, happiest or saddest thing you noticed today?
3. What would be the worst superpower to have? What would be the best superpower to have?
4. If you could be any character in a book, who would you choose and why?
5. When during the day do you feel the best? What season of the year do you like best?
6. Tell a memory of one of your favourite birthdays or other special days.
7. If you could solve one problem in the world, what would it be?
8. If you could, what part of today would you repeat?
What part of today would you change?

Activities over the phone/online

- Book club: both parent and child read the same book at an appropriate age level and chat about it.
- Movie Club: both parent and child watch the same movie and discuss what they thought of it. If they describe the movie they saw with a one-word answer, build on that. What made it 'cool', 'great,' or 'boring'? Ask about details, for example, 'What was the most exciting scene?'
- Share a snack or a cup of tea and biscuits over the video call.
- Learn a dance together, bake together, paint or do arts and crafts.
- Watch a YouTube video together, or do something like a short online yoga class together, over a video call.



Activities for Parents & Children

When choosing an activity to play with your children online ensure they include:

Having Fun
Taking Turns
Eye Contact
Interaction



Blowing Kisses

Blow kisses at your child, and let them know where they've gone – 'Oh look! It's landed on your nose!', 'It's landed on your forehead!' If they want, your child can try and catch them or blow them back for you to catch.



Charades

Choose parent or child to start the game. The player thinks of a book title, a famous person's name, a saying, a movie title or a song title to mime. Choose something with which your child will be familiar like sports or Disney. The player then acts out the word or phrase they've chosen to the other player who tries to guess the word.

Common clues used in charades:

- To indicate a book, pretend to read a book.
- To indicate a song, pretend to sing.
- To indicate the number of words, hold up that many fingers. Then hold up one finger before miming the first word, two fingers before the second, and so on.
- To mime a word that rhymes with the word you want players to guess, first tug on your ear to say 'sounds like'.



Going to the Shops

Start the game by either parent or child saying, 'I went to the shop and I put... **apples** in my basket'.

Then take it in turns to add something else to the basket while trying to remember what was there already - 'I went to the shop and I put **apples** and **biscuits** in my basket', 'I went to the shop and I put **apples** and **biscuits** and **bread** in my basket'.

You don't need to remember a big long list, just getting to four or five items is fine – it's just about having fun!





Row, Row, Row Your Boat

You and your child can both sit down on the ground or in chairs, and look at each other as if you are both in a rowing boat. Now you can both row the boat as you sing, adding in your child's name at the end.

Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Your child's name is such a dream!

Bubble Popping

Materials: Two sets of bubbles - one for the parent and one for the child.

The child will need an adult to help.

Blow bubbles towards the screen. The adult with the child also blows bubbles in the room the child is in, as if they are coming from the parent. The child must burst as many bubbles as possible, using fingers, feet or elbows, before they touch the ground.



More Ideas

- Play a game like I spy with my little eye.
- Share a snack. Count gummy bears, and talk about colours and flavours. With older kids, talk about favourite foods.
- Share some jokes. Take time telling riddles and jokes.
- Share music. Take turns sharing songs. Have fun while getting some exercise by having a dance party.



WHAT PARENTS SAY

“I celebrated a ‘big’ birthday, my son had a cake for me during the video call. We blew out the candles. It was a great surprise...”

This information was developed by the Clarecare Advocacy Service for Parents of Children in Care and Clarecare Family Support Social Work Services. It is based on consultation with parents of children in care, Tusla Alternative Care Services, HSE Primary Care Psychology Services and the Irish Foster Care Association.



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