

Parenting Together

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Keeping Children Connected with Friends from a Distance

Social distancing and school closures have made it challenging for children to stay connected with their friends. As parents, it is more important than ever to help keep our children connect with others safely in creative ways to build social skills, friendships, and so that they don't feel isolated. During times when in-person playdates and going to the playground are not possible, we have to get creative to find ways for kids to remain socially connected.

Set up virtual playdates

Apps, websites, and online platforms like Zoom, FaceTime, WhatsApp, and Marco Polo make it possible for children to connect online with friends and family members. Whether your child wants to chat one-on-one or meet with a group of friends, social interaction is vital to their well-being. Online apps can be used for activities such as playing side by side with action figures, reading to one another, working on a project together, playing a game, or



simply sit together while doing a bit of schoolwork or a craft. In fact, children don't even have to talk—they might simply find comfort in having a friend "around."

If you worry about your child spending too much time looking at a screen, consider shifting the connection from a screen-based app to a phone call.

Gather friends for a game night.

Even before the pandemic, games have long had a social component even if players are not in the same room together. Online game sites, like Pogo, allow your children to play some of their favorite board games, like Monopoly and Yahtzee, with friends.

Let's Play Uno allows children to play the classic card game online with friends for free. And Pokemon Go allows children to interact with friends and track their activity in the game. Since the pandemic, the game's manufacturers have made adjustments to the game that bring the Pokemon closer to home.

Even without apps or digital games, try some of these ideas:

- Ready, set, go! Your child and a friend can take turns choosing items to find around your home and bring back to the phone or device to share with one another (e.g., "Find three things that are red. Go and get your favorite book!")
- Play classic guessing games like "I Spy" or "20 Questions."



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Host a movie night for your child & friends

Netflix Party allows children to watch movies together. Anyone with a monthly Netflix subscription can add this free Google Chrome extension. You can synchronize video playback with your child's friends and add group chat so kids can chat during the movie. Anyone in the group can pause, play, fast forward and rewind the movie so everyone is in the same spot. Only those with an invite can get into the party, so parents don't need to worry about strangers getting into the chat room.

For those without Netflix, Airtime does something similar for online videos and TV shows, without the chat feature (they can still "react" via emojis, just not type out text).

So, grab your child some snacks, set up a comfy spot on the couch, pop some popcorn, and let them have a long-distance movie night with a friend or two.

Look for (or create!) neighborhood scavenger hunts

Many communities have come together to find ways for kids to leave little messages for each other. A group of neighbors in Brooklyn, for example, put rainbows in their windows. On walks, families made a game of finding the windows with rainbows and waved to neighbors and friends who passed from a safe distance. Described as a neighborhood game of "I Spy," The Quarantine Rainbow Connection even has a Google map of participating homes. Try starting a rainbow or stuffed animal window hunt in your own neighborhood.

The Book Nook

I Really Want to See You, Grandma
by Taro Gomi

Mis abuelos = My grandparents
by George Ancona

While We Can't Hug
by Eoin McLaughlin

Go "old-school" and send letters in the mail

Helping children learn to mail letters to friends is another way to help keep them connected. Sending a letter gives a child a chance to practice sharing about themselves and asking questions about their friends as well as practice writing. They can also learn about the mechanics of writing a letter and addressing an envelope.

Children can add drawings or stickers to their letter, or even create something together (e.g., a friend picture journal) by sending it back and forth.

Brainstorm with your child other ideas for staying connected with friends and family members. With ideas like these at their disposal, children will hopefully find that the need to distance themselves physically doesn't mean they have to cut off the social ties they have with the special people in their lives.

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Keep Children Healthy during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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How to keep your kids connected and happy during social distancing

<https://www.hcf.com.au/health-agenda/body-mind/netball/keeping-kids-connected>