

10 Tips for Meaningful Video Calls

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The COVID-19 pandemic has severely altered the ability for people living in care facilities to connect with family and friends. Video calls can be intimidating *and* a great way to stay connected while practicing physical distancing. Here are 10 tips to help get comfortable with video calls:

1. **Lights, camera, action!**

Some amount of “stage fright” is common among video call participants. Take a deep breath, expect a few awkward moments, and embrace the experience of learning how to make the best of this digital connection together.

2. **Can you hear me now?**

Even mild hearing loss can make it difficult to communicate using electronic tools. Speak slowly and clearly. Minimize background distractions. If you are at a care facility, your video call facilitator may have assistive devices that can help.

3. **Ready for your close up!**

Talking to a face on a screen takes some getting used to. Keep your images simple and clear by taking your call in a well-lit, uncluttered room. Place your device on a desk or a stand to keep the images steady.

4. **Take a moment.**

Making sense of information on video calls can take longer than it does in person. This can be especially true for group calls. Allow for a little extra time for everyone to get oriented to what’s happening, who is calling, and how. Keep sentences short, with just one thought in mind. Wait for a response before speaking again.

5. **Hello, my name is...**

It is a lot harder to recognize family and friends without traditional cues like physical presence, context and touch. Introduce yourself - “Hi Mom, this is your daughter, Rose.” Wait for a reply. Repeat, rephrase, or elaborate as needed. If all else fails, stay positive, and find something else to talk about.

6. **Can I tell you something?**

Persons with short-term memory loss have a hard time answering questions about recent events. Questions about what they ate, what they did, or what they are doing can be conversation stoppers. Instead, try sharing what you are up to, what’s happening with family members and friends, or stories of positive experiences from long ago.

7. Can I get some advice?

Even with significant memory loss, persons often hold onto their character traits, conversation style, sense of humour, wisdom and talents. Steering the conversation towards these strengths can make the conversation flow more readily and enjoyably. Try asking for help with a parenting issue or work-related decision. If this doesn't get the conversation flowing, talk about how you handled a situation and ask for feedback.

8. Your call matters.

Even if the person you're calling is sleeping or cannot respond, the sound of your voice can be reassuring and soothing. Tell them about what is going on in your life, read a poem or prayer or sing a familiar tune. Try sharing music, pictures, or videos. Whenever and wherever possible, offer a compliment, thank them for spending time with you, and tell them you'll call again soon.

9. Listen and reassure.

These are unprecedented times, and we are all coping with change and uncertainty. Emotions can run high, and it isn't easy to predict when or why. Feelings of frustration, helplessness, sadness, or anger can be a part of a video call. Managing these feelings can be especially stressful at a distance. Listening patiently and offering simple, reassuring statements can be supportive.

10. Poor connections happen.

Sometimes video calls just don't work out. Technical glitches, unexpected events, or low energy can interfere with a successful call. It is ok to end a call if it isn't going well. Don't be afraid to try again on another day.

Staying in touch will help you cope with pandemic-induced stress and uncertainty. We hope these tips will make it easier to have successful video calls. It is ok to struggle, we are all in this together!