

Tips to manage kids' virtual playdates

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See advice to help children socialise with their friends online while schools are closed.



Early years (under 5s)

Put some playtime back into their day with friendly faces from school or nursery:

- **Set up a parent group online**

Setting up a Facebook or WhatsApp group for your child's class can help you connect with other parents. Agree on some guidelines on what things can be shared or not in the group.

- **Make use of video chat tools**

Use tools such as Skype, Google Hangouts or Zoom to connect everyone for a virtual playdate and build it into their schedule so your child knows when it's happening.

Tip: *You could rotate different children taking the lead, so everyone feels involved – doing a show and tell or introducing their pet or favourite toy.*

- **Record a video message**

If you can't do a video call, then a nice option for this age is to record a video of your child giving a message to their friends and send it to your private group



This age group may feel the separation from their friends the most as they have established friendships and are less likely to have their own devices to stay in touch.

Primary school-age children (6-10)

- **Secure devices for children to use**

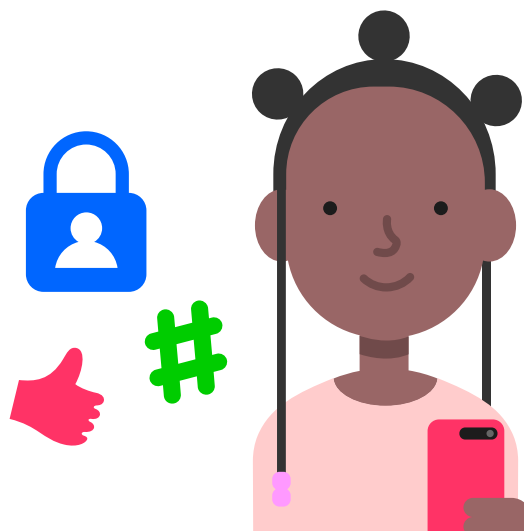
They may want to have one to one conversations with their closest friends as they would in the playground. If you're happy for them to use yours or a family device for this, make sure groups and conversations are private and you've applied the appropriate safety settings and restrictions.

- **Opt for child-friendly social apps**

There are also some safe [social media tools](#) for primary age children or you could ask your child's school whether they can help.

- **Suggest activities to do during video calls**

Schedule some activities to do together amongst their regular schedule, like playing a game or setting up a book club or Netflix party



Secondary school-age children (11+)



Most children in this age group will be established users of social media and it's likely that they'll want to spend more time on their devices.

- **Check-in on how they are socialising online**

Find out what apps they're using and make sure they have the correct privacy settings, particularly if they're starting to use apps like [Houseparty](#). Chat about the potential risks of being online more, what to do about [cyberbullying](#) and being asked to [share inappropriate images](#), particularly if they're separated from a boyfriend or girlfriend



Overview

Accept that kids' screen time will increase but encourage them to use screen time tools or activity monitors to see how their usage is changing and what impact this might be having on their physical activity or sleep.

Most importantly, continue to check in with them and be prepared to help them through the anxiety that being separated from strong friendship groups may cause.

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