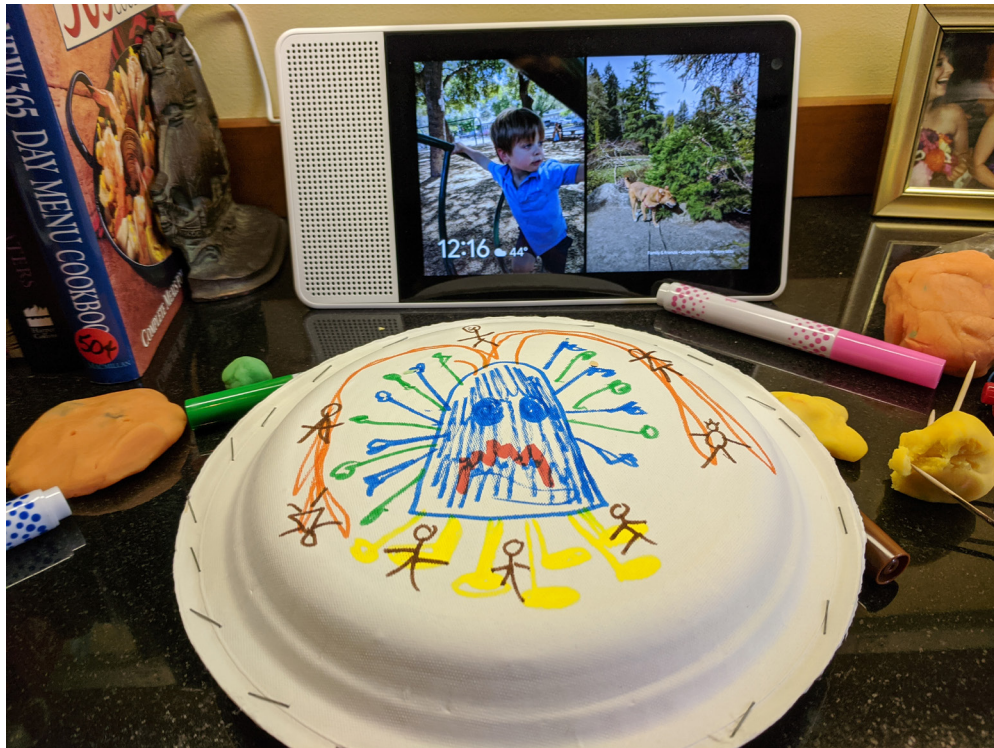




Unexpected Advantages of Sheltering:

How Grandparents and Special Friends Can Help By Reaching Out to Young Children Remotely “Nana and Pops Olympics”

Carolyn Webster-Stratton, Ph.D.



I was yearning to connect with my young grandchildren and to help their parents, who I figured were overwhelmed with caretaking 24/7 because of school closures. We started “hanging out” and this has been a wonderful gift for me.

(Zanny Milo, grandmother of 8 who live in 2 different states)



As stay-at-home orders are implemented across the world, many grandparents, aunts, uncles, or special friends are acutely feeling the loss and social isolation of being away from the children that they care about. During times of stress and hardship for families, the natural impulse is to gather to help and offer support, but that avenue is temporarily cut-off by the Covid-19 virus. At the same time parents of young children are stressed with working from home, exhausted with the demands of home-schooling, or just needing a break from the non-stop energy needed to be a parent to a young child who is suddenly thrown out of the usually daily routine. Grandparents, other relatives, and friends may be frustrated by not being able to step in to offer childcare, support, and also to enjoy the company of their special children.



Carolyn and Wally talk to children via Zoom

When I suggest that they use FaceTime, What's App, Zoom, Google Hangout, or Skype to connect remotely with these children some respond that they don't know how to do this. While this may feel like a daunting computer task to learn, I will confess that a month ago I was clueless about Zoom's possibilities. Now I rarely go a day without 4-5 Zoom calls. Whether you use FaceTime, What's App, Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts, or some other telecommunication platform that I haven't heard of yet, it is well worth challenging yourself to learn one of these platforms and use it to connect with grandchildren or young children you have special relationships with. After all, since you are secluded at home, you do have the time to learn something new and very likely the parents of these children would be happy to help you learn. Not only will these children love and look forward to this connection with you, but it will give their parents a break and time for self-care, or some important call they needed to make without their children being present. Moreover, you will feel the joy as well as increased intimacy as you see the children's responses.

Simply calling to chat will get old quickly as children are home missing daily routines and activities. Instead, join the "Nana Olympics" or "Pops Games" to help teach young children counting, math, reading, art, science, writing stories, or sharing a hobby of passion with you. This document is about some interactive ways you can use telecommunication to connect and play with young children. You can even help enhance their learning of academic concepts and social and emotional competence. Once you get started, you will likely discover all sorts of activities you can make up. The telecommunication approach follows the principles of *Incredible Years Parenting Programs*, that is:

- to be developmentally appropriate and geared to child's interests
- to be child-directed using narrated commenting to enhance language development,
- to encourage expression of feelings through emotional coaching and pretend play
- to reinforce social skills such as sharing, waiting and helping through social coaching
- to enhance problem solving and confidence through persistence coaching

Please see the Incredible Years web site for parents for Refrigerator Notes of key tips for these four coaching, interactive reading and child-directed play methods.

<http://www.incredibleyears.com/parents-teachers/articles-for-parents/>

“Nana or Pops Olympics”

Child-Directed Play Doh Olympic Parties Coached by Children



Use a telecommunication platform that allows you and the child to see each other. This child-directed game asks the child to take the lead and coach you how to make a playdough creation. The complexity of this will depend on the child's age and language level but likely will work best for children over 6 years of age who have the ability to wait and watch you construct something but love telling you what to do *or not to do*. You start by sharing the screen element of the Hanging Out, or Zoom platform that allows the child a close-up screen view of what you are doing. Here is an example script of a child-directed virtual playdough party when only the adult had playdough and is playing with a 6-year-old child.

- Adult:** What should we make?
- Child:** I want to make a puppy.
- Adult:** (has 5 colors of playdough on a paper plate) What color of playdough should I start with?
- Child:** Brown
- Adult:** I don't have brown. I have blue and pink and orange and green and yellow. Is there one of these colors you would like?
- Child:** Okay, yellow
- Adult:** (makes yellow body and holds up to show child) Here's part of his body. What should I add next?
- Child:** I want that to be his head.
- Adult:** Okay you want that to be his head.
- Child:** Put on ears.
- Adult:** (makes ears) So ears kind of pointy are you saying? You tell me if this is right? Does that look like a good ear? (shows child ears)
- Child:** Looks like Mickey Mouse.
- Adult:** Kind of does look like Mickey. We can call him Mickey the dog.
- Child:** He should have a long body.
- Adult:** Okay I am going to move his head over here a bit. Long body, how's that? is it a good long body?

- Child:** You can make it a bit bumpy.
Adult: (pokes body) You mean rough like that?
Child: Make it look fuzzy.
Adult: Okay I am making it really fuzzy. Here we go. (pokes body more)
Now what?
Adult: Okay I am making it really fuzzy. Here we go. (pokes body more)
Now what?
Child: He doesn't have eyes. We have to give him eyes.
Adult: What color eyes?
Child: Blue
Adult: (puts on blue eyes) Two blue eyes.

This continues with deciding on pink mouth and nose and 4 yellow legs with purple toe nails.



- Adult:** Does he have a name?
Child: I think "Pugsy"
Adult: He does look like a Pugsy.
Child: He needs a tail.
Adult: (makes a tail) I don't have any more yellow so I used orange. How is that? (shows child dog and makes a barking sound). Maybe he dipped his tail in orange juice?
Child: He is a naughty puppy.
Adult: He looks kind of curious or mischievous. Is he done?
Child: Maybe.
Adult: I love having you as my coach. You helped me make a funny puppy. I am going to send him in the mail to you. (makes airplane noise and gestures putting into mail) Adult could take a picture of the puppet and send in a text to the child.
Child: He might need some biscuits to eat.
Adult: Shall we make those now or do you want to make up a story about Pugsy?

In this exchange the adult gives the child the control over what will be made by the adult. Did you notice how the adult repeated what the child said and added slightly by commenting further on colors, body parts, feelings and textures? This interaction can continue for as long as the child is interested. If you are working with other children at the same time, they may ask you to make a space monster, or robots, or teddy bear, and perhaps even Dina dinosaur. In this case, the children will need to take turns being your coach and telling you what to do. At the end it is fun to make up stories about these creatures. The value of this activity is that the children have the power to direct what you are doing. This gives them a sense of control at a stressful time when they may be feeling powerless. This approach will enhance children's language development and increase their confidence, sense of security and imagination. It is sure to enhance your relationship with them.

Child-Directed Playdough Olympic Parties Sports-casted by Adult

Another variation of this playdough child-directed play, especially for younger children, is for both the adult and the child to have some playdough. In the example above, this child's family did not have playdough so the adult set up a virtual playdough event. However, it will be more developmentally appropriate for younger children to be able to actually manipulate the playdough themselves. Younger children will not have the patience, language skills, and attention span to comment and watch the adult make the playdough and not be able to do it themselves.

When both the adult and child have their own playdough to manipulate, the adult sportscasts or narrates the child's activity in a child-directed way. Narration of what children are doing is very empowering for them because it lets them know how much the adult values their ideas. It puts the child in the spotlight. This narrated attention enhances children's creativity and strengthens their language development. The key is follow the child's ideas and imagination and get into their spotlight with them by narrating their actions and describing your own actions. As in the earlier example, you can make creations, but this time, the child can take the lead in the physical creation. Here is an example of another playdough event that was coached by an adult with a 4-year old.



You can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes.

Winnie the Pooh.

- Adult:** (has playdough) What do you want to make?
- Child:** A teddy bear (starts to work with playdough)
- Adult:** I love that idea.. maybe like that book we read about Winnie the Pooh bear?
- Child:** Yes let's make Winnie. (child excitedly starts putting playdough body, heads and legs together)
- Adult:** I see you are making a fat, brown body tummy, now a head and nose... what a cute nose. Now you are adding some ears. Now some fat legs. You are good at this. Oh, is Winnie getting cold? (adult does nothing with her own playdough keeping attention on child and narrating what she is doing)
- Child:** Oh yes he is cold... he needs some fur. (prods body)
- Adult:** You are making Winnie some warm fur. Hmm... I wonder if he needs clothes?
- Child:** Yes, I am giving him a sweater.
- Adult:** Oh yes, his red sweater just like the picture in the book. He looks warmer now.
- Child:** He needs a hat too.
- Adult:** Oh, how fancy. Good idea, He looks happy and kind of loved.
- Child:** You make something Nana.
- Adult:** Sure, what should I make?
- Child:** Make one of Winnie's friends.
- Adult:** Should it be Tigger or Eeyore.
- Child:** Maybe Piglet.
- Adult:** Oh yes, Piglet is brave and kind and likes to help others.
- Child:** Maybe they can go to the forest.
- Adult:** Good idea! What color should Piglet be?
- Child:** Pink of course.
- Adult:** (making Piglet with playdough) Is this what Piglet's ears look like? She looks very brave even though she is small. I am having fun with you. I can't wait to see what adventures Winnie and Piglet get into. Maybe later we can read the Winnie the Pooh story together.

This interchange can continue as long as the child remains interested. The focus is more on the child's playdough experience than the adults playdough structure. Just focusing on the child's creation with adult attention may be all that is needed, especially with a very young child. Did you notice in the above exchange how the adult focused on some emotion words. This approach will build emotion language and empathy for another. Moreover, linking the art activity to a book you have read together, adds to the child's interest in reading and motivates them to tell their own stories. These are important pre-reading skills.

The following is a comment by the grandmother who was talking with the child on another day. This time, the grandmother had playdough and the child had pom-poms. While it is ideal to have the same toys, the principles of this child-directed, narrated play can still be followed with slightly different objects.

Yesterday my 4-year-old grandchild had some colored pom-poms and it was amazing how she was able to create stories using these little pom-poms. She created a story about a snowman in the garden complete with strawberry trees, flowers, waving grass and a big sun in the sky using only the pom-poms while I followed along and added to her story using my playdough because I didn't have any pom-poms. We then moved on and created a whole solar system with a pom-poms and playdough, and a farm where they grew wheat. Given just a few simple props to manipulate, she was enthusiastically creating for 45 minutes!

One of the best moments of our session was when I told her I had four corn stalks and they were growing taller and she replied, "Good job Nana!"

Blockcaster Mirroring Game

In this mirroring game both the adult and child have their own Lego blocks to manipulate. The adult imitates or mirrors what the child is doing with blocks with his own blocks while narrating the child's activity. Mirroring what a child is doing while narrating is very supportive because it lets the child know that what they are creating is important. This adult attention enhances children's creativity and the narration strengthens their language development. The key is to follow the child's ideas, get into their spotlight by narrating their actions, mirroring what they are doing, and describing your own actions.



Here is an example of how this Lego interactive play went with an adult and 8-year-old child who loves rockets. Screen time was shared so the child could see how the adult was following his ideas.

- Adult:** What shall we make?
- Child:** (starts with blue Legos putting them together) A rocket ship.
- Adult:** (copies child's actions) A rocket ship is a great idea.
- Child:** (continues stacking)
- Adult:** Okay you've got 6 large blue Legos together now and are adding more. Oh this looks like the launch pad. Is that what we are making?
- Child:** Yes, we have to have a strong launch pad. Then we make the rocket body and nose cone and fins.
- Adult:** Wow you know a lot about rockets. I am learning from you.
- Child:** Our rocket ship is going to take humans away from earth and the virus.
- Adult:** Oh that sounds like a brave adventure. What are you putting on now?
- Child:** This is the engine for combustion.
- Adult:** Are you the astronaut?
- Child:** This is our astronaut and we will give him a helmet but he won't need that in the spacecraft.
- Adult:** Do they only need that when they go outside into space where there is no air?
- Child:** Yeah it protects them from cold and with their space suit they can breathe.
- Adult:** Kind of like now, we are like astronauts are safe in our house and we are careful when we are outside our rocket ship until the virus is over. Later if you want you can read me one of your books about spaceships. What do you think?



The important thing about these virtual play sessions is that they are entirely child-directed. The child leads and the adult imitates, follows and expands upon the child's suggestions! It is kind of like the rules for improvisational theater where anything one person suggests is enthusiastically

adopted by the next. Praising children's ideas is an important part of these interactions. When children are stressed or worried about something, they may act it out their play themes. This is a normal and healthy way to cope, and adults can validate the imaginary characters' feelings and model ways to think about the issue and cope successfully. The scenario above helps the child think about how astronauts keep safe while in their spaceship, linking to the social isolation they are experiencing with Covid-19 and how they can keep safe.

Whiteboard Math Games:

For older school-age children you can do math games using the white board. In this case, the adult can give the child a math problem to solve and then the child can give the adult a math problem to solve. It is important to start with easier problems so the child is initially successful and then gradually increase the complexity. It is very important to know and follow the cues of the child you are working with. Some children will see this as a fun challenge and will be eager to play this with you. For other children, this will feel too much like hard schoolwork and will be an aversive activity. This will more likely be true for a child who finds the activity hard or who struggles in school. While there is the temptation to push harder if you know that the child needs math practice, you will not accomplish your goal by trying to make the child engage if they don't want to. If the child you are talking with shows resistance to this activity, back off and allow them to stick with easy math problems to increase their confidence or even to pick a different play activity instead.

Adult: (writes on whiteboard) What is 4 plus 2?

Child: Six

Adult: You are right, one point for you?

Child: What is 100 plus 100?

Adult: Hmm, a hard one. (writes on white board 100 and 100) Okay 1 plus 1 is 2 so must be 200.

Child: One point for you.

Continues

Adult: You have 10 points. Wow! Let's celebrate by making up a numbers story. *"Once about a time there were 4 elephants that met with 8 giraffes and that made a total of ... how many? Then they went to find food because they were hungry but 6 lions arrived...so two baby giraffes ran away and then there were..."*

Build a Story to Solve a Problem:

In this activity the adult starts by making up a story. For young 2-3-year old children with limited language, it might be something like, *"the cat chases the..."* Pausing to leave a blank for the child to fill in the word. If the child says, "rat" the adult responds, *"and the rat chases the..."* pausing again and so forth.

For preschool children you can build a story based on some special interest or time you spent together. For example, you can show them pictures of an adventure you had together either traveling or visiting them. For example, *"Remember when we went to the zoo. We saw a scary tiger that made a sound like.... and a cute ring-tailed Lemur who sounded like.... We wondered what kind of food they ate. How could we find out about that? Remember we saw a goat who stuck his tongue out at us, and we stuck our tongues out at them? Do you remember the Meerkat who was funny and*

cute? What do they eat? What is your favorite zoo animal? Shall we find a picture of that animal and read a story about this animal?" On a platform like Zoom, you can share a computer screen and could actually show the child the pictures that you are talking about. If you are doing FaceTime or What'sApp and have a physical picture or picture from a book, you could hold the phone up to the picture of the child can see. This makes the stories personal and also reminds them of happy times together especially at this time of social exclusion.

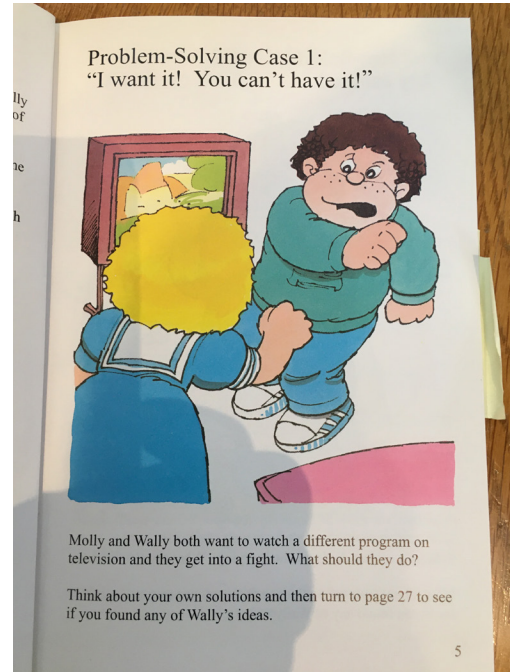
For school-age children, the adult can make up a more complex story related to a social problem they have had. Since children are at home with siblings all day and are unable to see their friends, there will often be sibling issues like fighting over what they are doing to do, or who's turn it is to pick the activity. Here is an example of how the adult can present the story, perhaps using a puppet. "Wally had a problem because his brother had been using the computer for a long time and he wanted a turn. Wally felt frustrated and angry about that and knew he had a problem. He tried to think of some possible solutions. One solution was to do something else, but he had run out of ideas for what to do. Is there another solution?" Then the child can fill in the blanks with some possible solutions.

This story focuses on helping the child learn to problem solve and come up with solutions. The problems presented in these stories might be related to real problems such as fighting with siblings, not listening to parents, resisting home-schooling, coping with boredom, feeling lonely, or wishing to see friends. The adult can use the white board or chat function (available on some platforms) to write down the solutions they come up with and then to assess which is the best solution. Afterwards you and the child can act out the scenario with the child showing Wally how he could solve the computer problem. For 4-8 year old children, it is fun to make up these stories using a puppet to present the problem and the child trying to help the puppet solve it. Then the puppet acts out the solution for the child's approval. *If the child also has a hand puppet available, the two puppets can act out the solution together.*

You can also use the *Wally's Detective Book for Problem Solving at School and at Home* for teaching problem solving. Use your share screen time to show the child the problem page. Read the problem to the child, then talk about solutions, and act out the solutions with puppets. At the end you can share Wally's solutions shown at the end of the book and add new solutions to your own list. This game can also be done with several children. Children can take turns thinking of and acting out solutions or might be divided into 2 teams that take turns. At the end the group evaluates the solutions in terms of safety, fairness and good feelings.

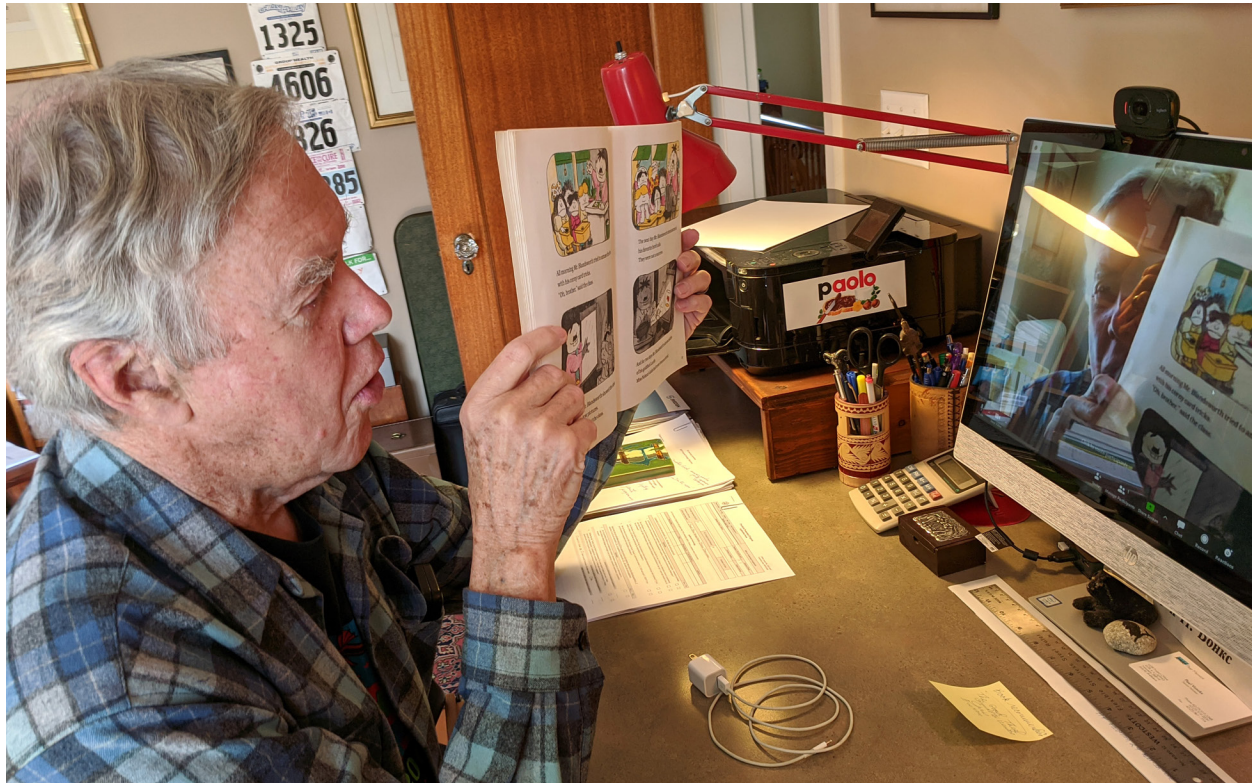
Later children might draw pictures or write stories about their solutions and make a detective solution book which they can read to you. Or, they can make up a play that they later show on a telecommunication call.

<http://www.incredibleyears.com/supplementals-pages/wally-detective-books/>



Reading a Story to Young Children

As you will see one of the advantages of telecommunication such as Zoom or Hang Out is that you can share the screen and show the child the book or object. This means the child can look at the book and you can read the story to the child or a group of children. Or, the child can read to you and you can see the book on screen. Follow the Incredible Years handout on the web site by using the *Reading with CARE* approach; that is, taking turns commenting on the pictures (C), asking open ended questions (A), responding with praise and encouragement (R) and expanding on what the child is saying using the "one up rule", that is one more word than the child's language (E). For young children use books with lots of pictures so you can talk about the pictures.



<http://www.incredibleyears.com/parents-teachers/articles-for-parents/>

Another option for story time for grandparents and those of you who have known the children's parents since birth is to tell stories of their childhoods. You might talk about what it is like to live in a time of horse and buggy milk delivery, or prior to TV and microwaves and I-phones. You can show them pictures of when you were a child.

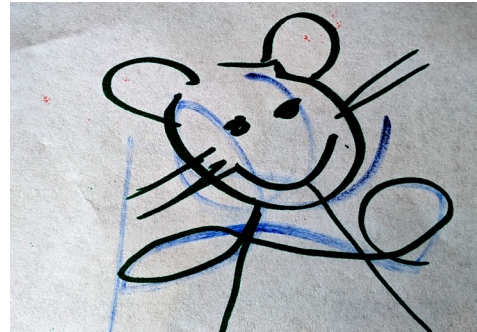
Using visuals to teach language

For very young children, with limited language, the adult begins with naming objects and actions before naming colors, shapes, or letters. For example, put a picture of a food item on your screen and see if the child can name it. If he names it, you repeat the word and praise him. "Yes, it is a banana. Way to go." If he doesn't understand the picture, show him the actual banana and name it. Before learning what pictures actually represent, it is important to associate the picture with the actual object. You could spend one telecommunication session focused on clothing items, or food items, or feeling faces, or animals, or letters, or colors, or textures, or social behaviors depending on the age of the child. This is especially appropriate for language delayed children or children on the autism spectrum.

Slightly older children can take turns with you, showing and naming pictures. If your child is interested in outer-space or dinosaurs, they can be encouraged to show you many pictures or objects that you probably can't name. This puts the child into the expert mode as they teach you new vocabulary. This game works best when the child is showing you pictures of things he is passionate about. Again, this can be done with more than one child. If the child is at the stage of learning to read, you can write down the object names and the child's description in the chat board.

Scribble Art Nana Olympics Game

Another fun thing you can do with a virtual white board is draw pictures together. You might draw something such as a funny shape and then your child draws something and you explore together what this object will be. You can change up colors as you go along. You or your child can make something out of the scribbles. Sometimes your picture becomes a story. Or, you can make a maze on your white board and see if the child can stay inside the lines without coming to a dead end. The principles of taking turns, naming a color, or guessing what it will be are praised and encouraged.



Yahtzee Pops Olympics Game

This is a classic dice game for older children (8-15 years) that has been around since the 1950's. You can download the rules and a scorecard from the website for this game or make your own score card. This is a fun way to practice math concepts. If you have several children on-line, you can each take turns and record your point totals. This game enhances a child's understanding of numbers. Other games, such as bingo, can be adjusted to play with one or more children. You and the child or children can each have a different bingo card and can compete to see who gets to Bingo first. You can hold up the pictures and they look for them on their card.

Involving more than one child

Many of the above games and activities can be played with multiple children. In general, it is better to consider the age of the children who are on the call together. For example, you will choose basic picture books for reading to young children and more complex books for older children where you may take turns reading. It may be easier to start with separate short calls for each child if their ages are too spread out. Or, you could have an older child read to the younger children.

Other Activity Ideas

- **Guided tour:** have the child give you a guided tour of a room in their house or their yard. Ask the child to show you or tell you about things in the space.
- **Scavenger hunt:** ask the child to find different common objects in their house or yard. For young children, you could show the object from your own home so that they can match the item. For older children you could challenge them to remember and find more than one object at a time. Ask the child to bring you along on the hunt.
- **Craft Project:** This will require assembly of materials, so is better for a school age child who is able to gather simple materials on their own, or for a preschool child who has a parent that is able to help set up the activity. This might be painting, teaching and gluing paper collages, cutting out pictures from a magazine, a simple sewing project, or any other craft that you have supplies for.

Tips

- It can be helpful to set up regular video chat times so that the children can look forward to the call and parents know they have that free time for other things
- Invite grandchildren to plan virtual celebrations with you
- Follow your child's lead and interests when planning telecommunication activities
- Be creative and keep the telecommunication activity simple and interactive
- Narrate what your child is doing and feeling
- Praise and encourage children for their ideas
- Use puppets to narrate children's activities, share feelings and problems they want help solving
- Use white boards and chats to keep track of their ideas or for praise
- Keep your worries in check during these times
- Check in at times to ask how the children are feeling; offer empathy and understanding and respond in comforting and calm way
- Send virtual hugs frequently
- Ask children to make up their own Olympics activity

See web site for more detailed tips on coaching methods. <http://www.incredibleyears.com/parents-teachers/articles-for-parents/>

- **Kitchen Project:** Make fruit salad, peanut butter sandwich, trail mix, microwave popcorn or some other simple cooking project. Older children may be able to do this independently, with your guidance (and parent permission). This is not recommended for younger children unless a parent would like to be involved.
- **Blanket Fort:** School age children will have fun making a blanket fort in the living room or bedroom, with your encouragement and commenting. Challenge them to find blankets, pillows, and chairs to create a cozy fort.
- **Have a meal or snack together:** Start a call when the child is sitting down to lunch or a snack. Have your own snack ready and eat together. You can talk about what you are eating, what you see in the room. You and the child might both bring a stuffed animal to join the meal.
- **Exercise time:** Have an activity time together. Challenge the child to do 5 jumping jacks, yoga stretches, or other movement activities. Join in with the activities or have the child set challenges for you. If the child has a safe place to be outside, these could be done on a porch or back yard.
- **Play I-Spy:** Have the child show you the room that they are in. Pick an object that you can see and then give the child clues to find it: "I spy something orange." "I spy something that makes music." "I spy something that you can sit on." You can adjust your clues to be harder or easier depending on the child's age. Take turns and have the child challenge you to find something in your space.
- **Helping Challenge:** Encourage children who are preschool-age and older to find a developmentally appropriate way to help their family. For young children, this might be doing a living room survey to find all the blocks that need to go into the bin. You can be the cheerleader for each block that is put away. Older children might have your support to reorganize a bookshelf in their bedroom, set the table for dinner, or put away the toys in the living room.

Responding to Covid-19 Questions or Responses

Children will absorb the stress and worry surrounding Covid-19 in their home environment. Don't be surprised if the virus theme, death, and illness come up your telecommunication play times, drawings, or drama play with puppets. This is completely normal and to be expected. This is a healthy way for young children to work out their feelings of fear. Grandparents and special friends can help children by listening to them and allowing them to express their feelings and can help to filter and interpret the situation and reassure them that they are safe and cared for.



Children under age 6 don't need specific or detailed information about the virus or the worldwide crisis because they are too young to process the meaning of it. Explanations should be simple, factual and reassuring about the future. Here are two examples of some ways to talk about this for this age group:

"I see you are a little worried about some new germs that are making some people sick. I hear from your parents that you are doing a great job helping others by staying at home so that germs aren't shared with other people. Your parents tell me you are washing your hands a lot, coughing in your elbow and giving each other elbow bumps instead of handshakes. That makes me feel happy knowing you are staying safe."

Or,

"You have heard that big word coronavirus which means flu, like a big cold. A lot of people are getting this, but it doesn't hurt most children or most grown-ups. We can make sure that others don't get sick by staying away from friends and family for a while so that we don't share germs. While I really miss seeing you in person, I know this is the best way for us all to stay healthy. I love you a lot and am happy that we can see each other through FaceTime and our Nana Olympics games? Maybe next time you can make up a game for me? I want you to know you can call me any time. "

If the child seems stuck in the fear, you can help your child think about ways to use puppets or imaginary characters to act out being brave helpers (doctors or nurses taking care of people) or to show acts of kindness. You can also teach your children, the "turtle technique". This when Tiny Turtle is afraid or angry or hurt an goes in his turtle shell and tells himself, "I can manage this", or, "I can stay calm" and takes deep breaths while thinking of a happy place or time. There is a vignette that shows you how to use the calm-down thermometer and Tiny Turtle to teach how to stay calm and to practice how to go into a turtle shell to take deep breaths and think of their happy place. Please see the video vignette below, or on our web site at:

<http://www.incredibleyears.com/programs/parent/attentive-curriculum/>

School-aged children will likely have heard about the coronavirus from peers, media, or listening to their parents' discussions. Rather than one big discussion, you can check in periodically while playing together on-line. Start off by asking children if they have heard of coronavirus and what they have heard or know about it. This provides a starting point on where to take the conversation and what corrective information might be needed. When they ask questions about the virus or their social isolation, take the time to explain what is going on, how the virus spreads, and how they can prevent it by staying at home, and how they can keep themselves and others safe. Encourage them to ask questions and express their worries, feelings of loneliness, or anxiety. Take your cues from the child's questions and responses as to how long this conversation should continue. Don't

over explain. Wait to see if they have further questions. This conversation will likely occur in brief discussions over many days or weeks as they absorb snippets of information, digest the meaning, and come back to you with more questions. Focus on keeping the conversation open and creating a relationship where you are a secure and safe base to come back to. Avoid encouraging children to think about worst case scenarios.

Some older children may want to find ways to be helpful. This might include calling elderly relatives, earning some money to send to a charity, helping take care of younger brothers and sisters, or sending you a picture or story they have made up. This helps them feel a sense of control and frames themselves as a helper. With children of all ages, be sure to spread a calm and patient tone during these discussions. If you seem anxious (which is understandable), this can escalate your child's anxiety. Remember, stress is contagious, but being calm, playful, and reassuring is also contagious. Even from a distance you can provide valuable support to the children and their parents.



Using puppets when talking to and playing with young children remotely can bring some joy back into their lives.