

11 Point guide to Video Chat

(Zoom, House Party, Face Time, WhatsApp etc.)

With any technology, there are upsides and downsides to video chatting. As always, your most powerful weapon is open communication with your children. Be a safe place, establish clear boundaries, and stay engaged with your child – you can use video chatting in positive ways in your home.

1. Define your dress code

The dress code when video chatting is the same as in person. Children don't always think this through and they may not recognize that what they're wearing is inappropriate when they answer a Facetime call.

2. Beware too much privacy

If you wouldn't leave two people alone behind a closed door, then the same goes for video calls. Children may feel "safer" trying something over chat (i.e. revealing body parts or getting into suggestive conversations) than they would if they were actually face-to-face in person.

3. No chat in overly intimate spaces

There's something sacred about a bedroom. It's a personal haven and a reflection of who you are and what you like. To allow someone in your bedroom means you feel safe around them. But if you wouldn't feel safe with this person in your child's bedroom, it isn't a good idea to allow video chat in there either. This may not be a line your child understands, since she or he has grown up with these types of devices around the house.

4. Remember that everything can be recorded and shared

Video chats can be recorded and screen-shot – often without the other person knowing. This means that even though it seems like a private conversation, it could end up viewed by far more than just one other person. Remind your children to be aware of this, and never say or do anything on video that they wouldn't be comfortable with others seeing.

5. Respect others' wishes

Children may get so comfortable video chatting that they turn the camera on others without considering how they feel about it. Make sure to ask permission to include others in a video chat (i.e. at a sleepover when other kids may be in their PJs). Some people, young or old, may not want to talk or be shown on video. Children should respect others' privacy without question and never push friends to do something they don't want to on video.

6. Don't fall into a false sense of safety with familiar people

Be mindful of any one-on-one chatting taking place between your child and an adult. The scary fact is 90% of victims know their abuser. Many predators know exactly how to make the child feel safe with him/her and they can easily fool us, too. Children should only video chat with other adults when we are there to listen in. Know how teachers, coaches, and youth group leaders are communicating with your kids.

7. Watch out for predators luring kids from gaming to one-on-one video chat

There are so many games where children can connect and play with a virtual team. With only user names to identify them, it's impossible to know who the real person behind the controller actually is. While they are often other kids, beware – they can also be predators who know exactly what to say to lure your child. TeenSafe reports that:

“Predators will most likely start off a conversation with an innocent question about the child's name or age, and then move into more inappropriate questions as the relationship grows. After contact has been initiated, the predator may try to convince the child to take the conversation over to another app such as WhatsApp, Skype or Snapchat.”

Become knowledgeable about grooming and warning signs that your child may have been lured into dangerous chats both inside and outside the game.

8. Sextortion is rising dramatically

Through video chats, predators entice children into sending compromising pictures of themselves. Then children are threatened with exposure if they don't send more. It's not just happening with older teens. In fact, 1 in 4 known victims were 12 or under when they were threatened.

9. Don't accept video chat requests from people you don't know.

Not ever. Not even once.

10. Put parental controls to work for you

Leave personal details out of video chat profiles, since some profiles are public. Know how to set privacy settings in any video chat apps. No app is fool-proof, so be sure to keep following all these guidelines no matter what app kids are using.

11. Prepare kids for viewing inappropriate images

Remind children what to do if someone sends them an inappropriate picture, asks for personal information or behaves in ways that make them uncomfortable. Plan together how they can tell you whenever they have had an unsettling experience.