



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth

# Connecting with Parents

## Pre-school at home hub

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# Connecting with families

During the closure period for ECCE services practitioners are asked to connect with the families in their setting and ask parents how they can best be supported to continue their children's learning during this time.

To support services in reaching out to children and families at home during the most recent closure period, new resources have been prepared which are available on the First 5 website under the Pre-school at Home Hub and will be updated regularly. They include one page activities that parents may find helpful to engage their children in learning. Services can send them directly to their families and may want to add tips, advice or supplementary activities based on the needs of the individual children in their setting.

Supporting remote learning can be challenging at the best of times but supporting families through hands-on, exploratory play will have long term benefits. The nature of remote learning will vary across ELC/SAC services and it is important that services have the flexibility to plan and connect with families in a way that is suitable to their particular circumstances. It may be enough to communicate with parents and children twice a week, each service will know their families best. Services are asked to prioritise extra support to vulnerable children and AIM children.

## Some suggestions for connecting with families

- Virtual calls (zoom, skype etc) from the child's practitioner
- Video messages from the child's practitioner
- Video of child's practitioner reading them a story
- Email/message/apps to share new ideas/activities and to communicate with children/families
- Short live activities

## Some considerations

### Video Calls

Some services have set up video calls with each key group of children and their key person. Many people are using Zoom, the free online video calling service that can allow a group of people to talk together in real-time.

While this may not be a new experience for adults and children, consider how to help the interactions flow by making it familiar to their past preschool experience.

It might be useful to start the call by singing your most familiar song, make sure you name all the children to make them all feel welcome and encourage them to talk but only when they are ready. Some children will want to talk a lot while others may be shy on this new medium so keep a check that everyone gets to share in a way that they are comfortable. Some children may not want to engage at all and that's ok too.

Encourage the children to have their favourite toy or book to show their friends what they are enjoying playing with at home.

Ask the children would they like to talk again and arrange a follow-up call for another time when they might want to draw a picture to show their friends (these can be emailed to the key person and shared during the zoom call through the shared window function).

Video calls should never be recorded without prior consent from all participants.

### Pre-recorded videos

Pre-recorded videos are a flexible way to share messages or activities with children and their families.

Plan what you want to do whether it is an activity or a message and write out what you want to say. It is important not to talk too quickly, relax and smile. Keep the camera close as children want to see your face, or the activity and hear you clearly.

If you are reading a book, turn the pages slowly and allow a bit of time of the children to engage with the illustrations.

Whenever activity you are doing think about how to support parents if there are younger or older children at home. You might give some suggestions for simplifying or extending the activity during or at the end of your video.

You can share your video through social media or messages. Agree with parents how this communication will occur.

## Facebook

There are two ways to connect with families on Facebook:

### Your public business Facebook page:

This is usually the business page of the service, it will be public therefore anyone can see the information including potential parents and nonservice users. It may be a new family's first interaction with the service. This type of page should be used when there isn't going to be any personal information or close up photos shared where children's faces can be seen without the child and parent's consent.

### A closed Facebook group:

A closed group allows services to share internet links, learning activity ideas, photographs or any other information with members. To join the closed group, parents need to request to join and the service approves their membership. Parents give their permission for their children to be included in photos. This type of page is usually used for families currently using the service.

This type of forum is more private than a public page however services should still be respectful and mindful of the pictures being shared to ensure all children are included in a positive manner (always check the background).

## Whatsapp Video Call

WhatsApp can facilitate calls to individual parents and children. Parents might need some reassurance about their child's ability to progress to school. They might need some suggestions about how to support their child's independence skills during the summer. Families need calm, positive and reassuring messages right now. You know best about the child's learning style and strengths. Your engagement right now could have a big impact on the family. WhatsApp can also facilitate group chat which can allow services to share internet links, learning activity ideas, photographs or any other information with members.

## By Post


Sending a letter or activity pack to children reassures them that you are still there. Children love to receive something in the post addressed to them.

Links to websites with ideas for play and activities to share with families:

[www.first5.gov.ie/parents](http://www.first5.gov.ie/parents)

[www.gov.ie/LetsPlayIreland](http://www.gov.ie/LetsPlayIreland)

[www.facebook.com/NCNPlayhub](http://www.facebook.com/NCNPlayhub)



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