

Video chat with family

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Best ways to video call with family. Best app to video chat with family.

As a freshman in college in the year 2000, I remember struggling mightily to pay my 400-minute monthly cell phone bill. I was trying to maintain a long-distance relationship with my boyfriend, but our time to talk was limited due to his packed baseball schedule, my two jobs, and, most of all, the fact that we'd only dated for a month before heading to separate schools. He's my husband now - but back then we needed to be able to get to know one another in a world that seemed stacked against us. Thankfully, that changed when a peer introduced me to a free online video chatting company. I don't remember the company's name, and I'm sure it's long-since gone extinct and been replaced by newer evolutions, but back then it opened up my world in ways I'd never dreamed possible. It gave me the chance to spend hours talking with my boyfriend face-to-face - even though we lived more than 200 miles apart. While I'd like to think my relationship would have survived nine months apart even if video chat hadn't been around, there's no way to know for sure. What I do know is that the video chat industry continues to revolutionize the way people interact on both a personal and professional level, and it remains a major part of my life as an online entrepreneur. While it's come a long way since its infancy at the turn of the millennium, I'm constantly surprised by how people so often fail to make the most of it. Popular Video Chat Services There are many video chat services, but the following are among the most popular: Motley Fool Stock Advisor recommendations have an average return of 397%. For \$79 (or just \$1.52 per week), join more than 1 million members and don't miss their upcoming stock picks. 30 day money-back guarantee. Sign Up Now Skype Skype is a mostly free video chat, file sharing, and instant-messenger service owned by Microsoft. It's quite possibly the most used, most well-known one of the bunch. Computer-to-computer calling is free, but if you want to call mobile phones or landlines from your Skype service, you have to pay a fee. For United States customers, these fees range from \$3 to \$14 per month. I use Skype to host video interviews with guests from around the world for a weekly podcast. Google Hangouts Google Hangouts is a bit buggy, but an excellent option for individuals who want to organize large, private conference calls, or who want to stream interviews from the video chat function directly to a YouTube channel. For instance, when I helped host the Blog Well Summit online conference series (geared toward health and wellness bloggers and focusing on blog design, branding, and development), we held our live interview panels through Google Hangouts. Our viewers could watch and participate by joining in on YouTube, Google Hangouts, or the Blog Well Summit website (Google owns and operates YouTube, enabling Hangout leaders to link their accounts and stream live Hangouts to YouTube). Hangout leaders can also embed a live stream on any website, as we did with our Blog Well Summit interview panels. Google Hangouts are currently free. FaceTime FaceTime was Apple's answer to video chat services. Announced in 2010 and officially launched in 2011, FaceTime enables Apple device users to engage in one-on-one video chats, as long as their iOS device has a forward-facing camera. FaceTime is free whenever you're connected to WiFi, but data charges do apply when you use it on a cellular data network. Reasons to Improve Video Chat Quality Video chat makes the world a seemingly smaller place. In 2005, I was interviewing for a job in a different state, and the potential employer went to great lengths to set-up a video conference job interview so we could chat "in person" before moving further along in the process. Both of us had to work with local community colleges to arrange conference rooms where we could hook into the campuses' Internet service and use their cameras for chat. Today, of course, this wouldn't be an issue. In fact, in 2010 I participated in another cross-state job interview and had no problem at all connecting and chatting with the potential employer via Skype. Video chatting makes it possible to stay in touch with friends and family, connect with business partners, and host get-togethers with people you've never met. Not a week goes by where I don't use video chat for one reason or another, and because my husband and I have mastered the science of high-quality video chats. In fact, we've gotten so good at looking awesome on camera that I always receive compliments on our setup. While it's possible to get by with sub-par video quality, the quality of your interactions, level of your professionalism, and even the business opportunities you're offered may expand when you improve it. Think about the "halo effect." In essence, it's the idea that when someone forms a favorable or unfavorable impression of someone or something, that impression is then transferred to other, unrelated aspects of that same person or thing. For instance, if you visit a website that's beautifully designed and easy to navigate, you're more likely to assume that the content is also high-quality, even if that's not necessarily the case. On video chat, if your picture is clear and your audio is good, the people on the other end are more likely to assume you've got your act together and are interested in what they're saying. Obviously, the halo effect isn't infallible. You can still screw things up by saying something flippant or failing to prepare for your online meeting. However, when you improve the quality of your video, you tilt the scales in your favor. How to Enhance Video Quality Luckily, enhancing your video quality is surprisingly easy. Use the following tips to wow the person on the other end of the connection. 1. Invest in an HD Webcam Low-quality, built-in webcams leave you with a grainy, low-light look. A couple of years ago, my husband and I bought a \$99 external HD webcam from Logitech (the same model is currently available for about \$75), and it vastly improved our video chat clarity. External webcams may not be ideal if you're chatting on a mobile device, but they're small enough to clip to a laptop or desktop, and they can make a real difference in your video. 2. Pay Attention to Back-Lighting One surefire way to hurt your video quality is to sit with your back to a window or a bright light. When light is shining toward your back and into the camera lens, it makes everything in the foreground - that's you - show up dark. By turning your computer so you're side-lit or front-lit, you can vastly improve your picture. 3. Give Yourself a Background Cameras love context. Leaning against a wall while chatting online might feel comfortable, but it makes it harder for the person on the other end of the conversation to draw visual perspective. Try to choose a wall or background that offers some contrast without being overly busy - but, more importantly, provide space between your body and the background. Consider chatting in a location that's a few feet away from a wall with something visually interesting on it, like a piece of artwork. Just remember that if your desk or floor are showing in the background, go ahead and make sure your space is tidy. 4. When Appropriate, Buy Lighting Truly good video consists of a subject bathed in natural light that originates from behind the camera. Setting up your chat in front of an open, sunny window is one way to achieve this effect, but if you have a hard time controlling the light at your location, you can always create fake "natural lighting." Since so many of our business conversations are held through Google Hangouts and Skype, my husband and I decided to invest in a Softbox Lighting Kit. Ours cost \$200 for a full set of three professional lights, but if video chat isn't a major part of your business, you can probably get away with a few well-placed lamps that you already have at home. 5. Make Sure You Have a Good Connection I will never forget one Skype interview I hosted, where the person on the other end set up her computer on a shared connection at a busy Starbucks. It was a disaster. Her connection was poor, her video kept freezing up, and the background noise was so distracting that it was hard to hear what she had to say. At all costs, try to host your video calls through a personal, high-speed Internet connection that won't be subject to the bandwidth usage of shared Internet users. Also, shut down any other programs that might interfere with the bandwidth necessary to maintain a high-quality call. For instance, if you're not a good idea to download files while video chatting. Finally, understand that cable Internet companies generally only promise download speeds "up to" the level you're paying for. So if you're paying for a speed "up to" 10 Mbps, you may only get one or two Mbps during peak times of the day. This is because cable lines are usually shared - if everyone on your block gets home and starts streaming Netflix at 6pm on Monday, the download speeds for everyone is diminished. If you're using cable Internet, try to schedule your video chats during non-peak times, or consider upgrading to a faster Internet speed. When I started working full-time at home, I realized that our 10 Mbps service wasn't cutting it anymore - that's when we upgraded to 50 Mbps, and now we're downright spoiled with up to 300 Mbps. 6. Use a Wired Internet Connection You almost always get better Internet speeds when you're plugged into a wired Internet connection. These save you from the finicky nature of some wireless connections that kick you offline without warning. When my husband and I started getting serious about our podcast back in March, we knew we had to set up a dedicated computer with a wired Internet hookup. While we had to rearrange the location of our router, it was well worth it - after more than 100 interviews, we haven't lost a single video call (at least on our end). Maximizing Your Online Appearance Almost no one looks as good on video as they do in real life. The camera washes you out and squashes you down from 3D to 2D, and it doesn't always play well in your favor. So, even though I don't regularly wear makeup, I almost always put some on before hosting a video chat. Plus, I can see myself in the video playback when I'm talking to someone else and if I don't like the way I look, it can be distracting. Here are a couple of ways I pump up the volume on my appearance. I don't go so far as to layer on the makeup to the point where it looks completely unnatural, but because I do put on more than I'd normally wear, I end up feeling "made up." Don't worry, though - this overdone effect is actually played down on camera. I'm a woman, but these tips can work for guys too, particularly during professional online meetings when appearance is most important. 7. Wear a Foundation I'm an IT Cosmetics fanatic, and I love its Celebration Foundation Illumination powder. Because it's a powder foundation, it's practically impossible to over-apply or miss a spot - perfect for guys or gals who aren't used to wearing makeup. The subtle illumination adds a glow to the skin that really pops on camera. Plus, it evens out skin tone and hides fine lines and wrinkles very effectively. You don't have to use IT Cosmetics to get the same effect - just use the foundation you respond best to based on your age, skin type, and natural color. The key here is to create an even complexion, so feel free to experiment with tinted moisturizers, liquid foundation, or powder foundation. 8. Apply Concealer to Your Creases Go ahead and apply your favorite concealer to your under-eye circles and blemishes, but go a step further and put some on the creases around your nose and mouth. I love IT Cosmetics' Bye Bye Under Eye concealer because it's thicker than other concealers, and it does a great job of evening out wrinkles that might otherwise be visible on camera. Not to mention, a little goes a long way - I got a tube a couple of years ago that I'm still using. 9. Use Bronzer Because the camera washes you out, it's up to you to create facial contours. Apply a bronzer across your cheekbones, along the ridge of your nose, and following your jaw line to help create dimension. 10. Wear a Little More Makeup Than Usual I don't overdo my makeup because I still want to look natural, but I do add a dab more color to the apples of my cheeks, put on a coat of lipstick and lip gloss, and wear eyeliner and mascara. If you regularly wear a fair amount of makeup, it's a good idea to ramp it up a bit for the camera in order to look like yourself. 11. Do Your Hair There's no reason to go overboard here, but you should do something with your hair so it looks like you made an effort. If you're like me, you're constantly battling fly-aways and bedhead. Consider buying an over-the-ear set of headphones - the bulkier headband and headphones do wonders for masking hair problems. 12. Wear a Plain Top That Contrasts Your Skin and Background You want the person on the other end of the video chat to pay attention to your face, not to the wild print on your top. Likewise, you don't want to wear a shirt too close in tone to your skin or the background because you don't want to fade into your surroundings. Choose a color that contrasts nicely so that you "pop" from the screen. Just keep the cut and design simple. 13. Dress for the Occasion If you're attending an online job interview, wear a suit. If you're hanging out with friends, wear what you'd normally wear socially. If you're meeting a love interest for the first time, dress nicely and flaunt your assets without going overboard. Just because you're at home in bed doesn't mean you should wear your pajamas when video chatting. 14. Wear Appropriate Pants I know there's a strong temptation when chatting online to pair a suit top with running shorts because the person on the other end of the chat can't see below your waist. Trust me, I understand the temptation. The problem is, you never know when you might have to stand up and do something while the video's streaming, alerting the other viewer to your "business on the top, party on the bottom" attire. I have a few pairs of black pants that look like business attire, but are actually stretchy yoga pants that I keep on-hand for just these occasions. I have two final, and incredibly important tips for looking your best on-camera. 15. Don't Mess With Your Look Because you can see your own video feed during your online chat, you might notice every single hair that falls out of place. Avoid the temptation to mess with your hair, clothes, or makeup while on camera. The most distracting video I ever watched was one where the woman was constantly playing with her own hair and calling attention to her bangs. You wouldn't do that in an in-person conversation because you wouldn't be able to see yourself - don't do it when chatting online. Put yourself together before you start streaming, then accept whatever you look like during your chat. 16. Look at the Camera, Not the Screen This has taken a lot of practice, but it's something I've gotten very good at - I only look at the computer screen when the person on the other end is talking. When it's my turn to talk, I turn my eyes directly to the camera so that the folks on the other side of the conversation get the impression that I'm looking them in the eyes. If you look at your screen instead of into the camera, it can appear as if you're looking down, rather than at the person you're corresponding with. Don't Overlook Audio As important as it is for you to look nice on camera, it's equally important - possibly more important - that your voice be clear and intelligible. You can easily improve your audio by investing in a set of headphones with an external microphone. This offers better sound and cuts down on the background noise your computer's microphone is likely to pick up. Also, using headphones helps reduce speaker feedback. If you're not wearing headphones while chatting online, your computer microphone picks up the other person's voice from the speakers and creates a feedback loop. This is distracting and really hard to edit out if you happen to be participating in a professional interview. Go for headphones with a built-in external microphone. You can pick up a pair for under \$50 from Amazon, such as the Sades Stereo Gaming Headset with Microphone that costs about \$30. We actually use a separate external microphone, so my headphones - the I-MEGO Throne Cambo headphones - don't have a built-in mic, but I absolutely love them. A pair costs \$80, but it's the only pair I've found that doesn't eventually give me a headache from extended wear. Final Word If you haven't jumped on the video chat bandwagon yet, it's just a matter of time. Whether you Skype with your kids while they're away at college, FaceTime with your best friend while she travels abroad, or participate in a Google Hangout as part of an online workout program, video chatting is becoming the norm for long-distance relationship building. Make your experience the best you possibly can by perfecting your video chat quality today. Do you use online video chat frequently? How do you maximize the experience?

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