

Study: Video chat reduced feelings of isolation among grandparents during COVID-19 pandemic

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Access to video chatting helped grandparents stay connected and reduced feelings of isolation during the COVID-19 lockdowns, a new

study found. The study, conducted by a team from Vanderbilt and four other universities and funded by the American Association of Retired Persons, found that 71 percent of grandparents of children ages birth to five years old reported that they increased their reliance on video chat technology to stay connected because of stay-at-home or physical distancing precautions.

"The mandated lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the ability of elderly Americans—a group already at increased risk for [social isolation](#)—to spend time with their families," said Georgene Troseth, professor of psychology at Vanderbilt University and one of the lead researchers on the study. "Access to video chatting served as a critical method for [grandparents](#) to stay connected."

The study included almost 1,600 grandparents of children younger than 5. According to Gabrielle Strouse, professor of psychology at the University of South Dakota and 2011 Vanderbilt doctoral graduate, grandparents who used video [chat](#) "reported higher perceived closeness to their grandchildren and enjoyed the calls more, particularly those who were geographically more separated."

Interestingly, the length of chat was not nearly as important as frequency of interaction. Of the grandparents who indicated that video chat was a meaningful way to stay connected, 68 percent said that the calls lasted less than 30 minutes on average.

Many grandparents in the study indicated that they wanted to incorporate developmentally appropriate games and learning activities during the conversations. In response, the AARP released recommendations to support increased engagement. The recommendations included taking meaningful time to connect and to be creative and playful.

The researchers found that grandparents became more comfortable using

the technology as the pandemic progressed, signaling that [video](#) chat may continue as a form of communication long beyond the current crises.

"The recent progression of vaccine rollout has made it possible for many grandparents to physically see their grandchildren safely," Troseth said. "Still, we have seen a tremendous increase in the potential of [video chat](#) to serve as a vital tool to reduce isolation among the elderly in the future."

The report, "[Boomers and Zoomers: Grandparents Using Video Chat to Connect with Young Grandchildren](#)," was released by AARP in June 2021. The research is also published in the journal *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*.

More information: Gabrielle A. Strouse et al, Zooming through development: Using video chat to support family connections, *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/hbe2.268](https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.268)

Provided by Vanderbilt University

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