



# Online Tools and Offline Ideas to Keep Kids Connected with Friends and Family

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We've said it here before, and you may have heard it several times since, that social distancing doesn't have to mean social isolation. At Kids Academy, we know what you're thinking: how can a parent possibly keep the kids connected with their friends? As adults, we have a variety of ways and options to keep connected to others during stay-at-home order thanks to smartphones, computers, and the internet. However, what about our young children who are not so adept in typing or reading, let alone managing the technology itself?

Fortunately, there are many ways to keep kids connected to their friends, family, and teachers that you may not have considered until now. While kids might not be able to gather for sleepovers, they can still come together virtually with the help of apps designed especially for kids and families. If you're looking for apps to host virtual playdates, or ways to stay connected, we have a kid connection tool set to share with you.

# Virtual Kid Connection Tools and Ideas for Using Them



Many teachers across the country have already turned to Zoom. While Zoom is still great for videoconferencing, you might be looking for alternate tools that can allow your child to have a bit more fun and interaction. Try the following ideas and apps to facilitate virtual playdates:

## Idea #1 Host a Virtual Movie Night

Due to the sweeping stay-at-home orders and restrictions across more than half of the country, the giant movie streaming site, Netflix, has created a completely new way to watch movies together without even being in the same room! The new feature is called Netflix Party, and it's a free extension that you can add to your Google Chrome browser.

After downloading the extension, you can host a watch party with friends that allows for synchronized playback, and an in-screen group chat.

Simply contact your child's friend's parents to set a time and ensure that everyone has the extension downloaded and ready to go. Then follow the on-screen prompts to connect with your child's friends and watch a movie while chatting away!

## Idea #2: Read Books and Color Together

Use the apps that enable to read books on-screen together, as well as support virtual coloring such as Caribu. Kids and family members can talk, see each other, all while reading and coloring together on the screen.

At Kids Academy, you can enjoy family time spent together - all while reading books, and coloring fun and engaging worksheets for a variety of topics, from nature and wildlife to holidays and cultures across the world.

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[At Kids Academy, it's our mission to close learning gaps and prevent learning disruptions during school closures. That's why we're offering you 50% off all membership plans for our all-in-one Talented and Gifted app.](#)

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## Idea #3: Have a Game Night

When most people think of hosting a game night, they tend to imagine in-person board games, which children often enjoy with their friends! But in-person playdates have been discouraged or outright banned because of the recent events. So what's a parent to do? Host a virtual game night, of course!

Offer kids the chance to play games on the web using a tablet, smartphone, or computer. This means that kids can play games like Scrabble or Monopoly from a distance. In addition, if your child has access to Xbox Live, the PlayStation Store, or Nintendo Switch Online, they can play a whole host of family and kid-friendly games virtually through their gaming consoles. Lastly, popular game apps like Yahtzee with Buddies or Uno could allow children to play classic multiplayer games from afar.

## Offline Ideas for Staying Connected

If you're worried about the kids having a bit too much screen time, let's explore some offline ideas to keep kids both busy and connected. Try the following activities that allow for social experiences while social distancing:

### Idea #4: Neighborhood Scavenger Hunt...From a Distance!

You may have seen this idea or a similar one spread around on your local neighborhood messaging board, but if you haven't, check with your neighbors to see if you can arrange for a fun scavenger hunt that kids can participate in at a distance! The game is extremely simple, and all that is needed is a teddy bear or stuffed animal!

To play, simply find a teddy bear and put it in a window that is easily seen from the outside sidewalk. Leave the bear there for others to find on their hunts! When you and

your children are spending time outdoors, simply take a walk around your neighborhood, being sure to stay at least 6 feet apart from other pedestrians. Look at the houses to find teddies in the windows! Keep count with your children to see how many bears they can find in your area!

### Idea #5: Leave Sidewalk Chalk Messages for Friends

The pandemic is a scary situation that leaves many children and adults alike stressed and worried. Why not join with other neighborhood children in creating inspirational messages or positive pictures? Gather your sidewalk chalk in a bucket and simply take a walk around the neighborhood. Stop by your friends and neighbors, and write or draw positive messages and pictures to show that you care for them and miss their company. Leave the messages on driveways, sidewalks, or street corners. Plan ahead to share with others so they can join in on the fun!

Try reaching out to others using a local messaging board on Facebook, or the Next Door app. After sharing with others, see if your family gets any special messages of their own. Feel free to take pictures of the messages to keep in a journal, diary, or scrapbook your child may be making to remember this very strange time.

### Idea #6: Need something offline to do? Write a letter!

Are you looking for something more educational to do while your child waits on their schools to begin their online distance learning programs? For this activity, we go old school, while teaching children a thing or two about sending mail and addressing letters. Get out the stationery and envelopes, because one way to connect to others is by simply taking the time to send a card or letter!

Gather the addresses of friends or family members your child would like to write to. Don't forget to ask your child's teacher if they are able to write to them! Many little learners are missing their teachers during this unexpected time off from school. Or task your child with writing to Santa, because it's never too early to be thinking about Christmas!

Regardless of the recipients, remind your children about common letter-writing procedures, like opening and closing phrases. Practice proper penmanship, and if your child is learning to write in cursive, take this opportunity to practice! Finally, help your child address the letter, place a stamp, and walk out to the mailbox and raise the flag. Maybe in a few days or weeks he or she will get a response!

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It's easy to forget that kids might need some additional support during the pandemic. While they might not know exactly what's going on in the world, they do know that their normal daily routine has been upended and that they no longer get to see their teachers, friends, and even family members outside the home.

Make this time a little bit easier for everyone involved by staying connected with neighbors and friends. Use the ideas and tools listed above to socialize while remaining at a safe distance during the coronavirus crisis.

