



You have a Skype with your child/children ?



REPR guide
To adapt the best way possible
Virtual visits with children

Why this guide?

The professional team of the REPR Foundation wishes to have a Skype Guide to give some ideas and advices for the visits by visioconferences, as Skype, to take place in the most pleasant way possible for the children. Depending of their age, the moment of the day and the relation with their parents, there are a few tips for the interest of the child to be in the center of the moment. So the meeting can be as pleasant as possible and enjoyable for everyone.

In a general way, the researches show that it is **essential to maintain and develop the relations between the children and their parents in prison**, this when, and only when it is in the superior interest of the children. Therefore, they are psychological, emotional and practical reasons, but also legal obligations exist, especially in relation to The Convention relative to children's rights (CIDE) of 1989.

Otherwise a **Recommendation of the Council of Europe** concerning the children of inmates specifies that virtual visits must be encouraged, but must in no way replace the real visits when these are possible¹.

The whole team of REPR is persuaded that a visit by Skype is an appointment that must be planned with the child, whatever is his age. It is essential that he is not taken by surprise, so he can have pleasure and enjoy this meeting.

At what age can we take benefit of Skype visit?

Let's remember that the very young child lives in the present, in here and now. From **the age of eighteen months**, he knows that you continue to exist somewhere and that you will resurface in his present. But what holds his attention, is his immediate circle and the people he sees².

Before 2 years, you can install your baby on your knees to show him his parent in prison, but it is with you that he will exchange smiles and facial expressions and it is you who will be the mediator of this relation via Skype. At the period of motor sensory discoveries, he explores his environment with his senses and he has very little interest in people, even familiar, who are moving on a flat screen. It is important for the attachment (=bonding) relationship « parents/children » that the father or the mother in prison can see his or her child, even on a screen. It is important to know the neurobiological abilities of the baby which do not really allow him to share with his parent who is on the other side of the screen.

¹ Recommandation CM/Rec (2018) 5 du Comité des Ministres aux États membres concernant les enfants de détenus, adoptée par le Comité des Ministres le 4 avril 2018, lors de la 1312e réunion des Délégués des Ministres « Article 25 » <https://rm.coe.int/recommandation-cm-rec-2018-5-concernant-les-enfants-de-detenus-fra/16807b343b>

² <https://www.parents.fr/enfant/education-et-vie-sociale/nouvelles-technologies/ordinateur-portable-tablettes/a-partir-de-quel-age-un-enfant-peut-il-communiquer-par-skype-336031>

Between 3 and 6 years, it can be possible to make a visit by Skype, but it is essential to explain the specific situation to the child. The ideal would be to have a photo of the parent in prison in front of the screen of the computer, that you can show to the child to give sense to the situation.

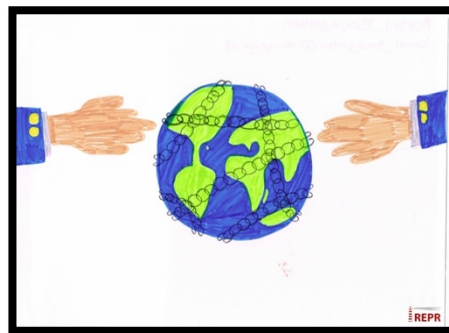
Generally, for the children, but in particular for this young age range, the parent is the one that leads the discussion. The child is not capable to do it yet, even in his mother's native language.

It is otherwise essential for the children under 10 years **to deactivate the screen on which the child can see himself** during the conversation: he can be very deconcentrated by the vision of his own image and face.

Around the age of 6 years the child is capable of understanding the notion of conversation on screen by distance. He can totally enjoy it, because he is capable to make the difference between his parent who is far and the image of his parent on the screen. Though this often involves to taking some time to explain and put words on the phenomenon.

Be careful to have in mind that a conversation of more than 5-10 minutes in a row is, for a child of 6-8 years, difficult to maintain for his concentration.

We present you a few ideas and tips to prepare yourself in the best way for these visits, to use the time allocated in a playful way during the Skype and to handle and organize the after visit.



The whole team of REPR is available to discuss on your personal situation, by Skype, by phone or during an interview.

Do not hesitate to take contact with us in any time, at 0800/233.233 (free number if you're in Switzerland), 021/791.02.72 or info@repr.ch, rue du Tunnel 1, 1005 Lausanne.

To prepare yourself before starting

In the prison

- Have the precise address and the number of the person to contact
- As it is essential to properly prepare the children, try to respect as possible the time that is planned
- Think in advance about what you wish to talk about with your child, by example, to tell him an event of your day, ask simple questions about school, his friends, what he sees through the window or prepare a little game. Be careful, you are the one who is leading the discussion
- Know correctly the rules of the establishment and respect them

At home

- Inform in advance the Skype specifying the time of the meeting.
- Explain to the child who will be present on the different sides of the screen, and if possible, with the support of a photo for the young child.
- Explain to your child the rules and the functioning of the visit.
- Help your child prepare this moment by imagining what he wants to say (for example to talk about his day, give news of his family, of his pet, to ask questions to his parent in prison, to show a drawing, an object, etc.).
- In the case of siblings, define in advance the participation of each of them.
- Fit out the space for each of you to be comfortable and feel in security, have available the necessary equipment as a teddy, dummy, a game, a drawing.
- For your child to be the most available possible during this meeting, think of stopping the ongoing activity, if necessary, go to the toilet or change a nappy.
- Check if your child is thirsty or hungry before the meeting and provide if necessary a glass of water, a bottle or something to eat.

During the Skype visit

- Ritualize the beginning of the visit: the children need to be reassured by repeated « hellos » and « good-byes ». The usual cuddles are impossible, so it is a question to find a new way to start. Why not a specific check, a sign with the hand, a song?
- The adults often start the discussion. Ask simple and open questions, to which you cannot answer only by yes or no, to privilege the exchanges with the children.
- Like a visit at the parlor, it is important to bring games in the meeting. Here are a few ideas and tips for games that can be done without special equipment and through screens:
 - o Game of pulling faces
 - o Imitating animals
 - o Follow your finger by sticking it on the screen
 - o Leaf, stone and scissors
 - o Guess at what I am thinking
 - o Jokes each in turn.
 - o A small *tray* (find a place, a garment, a food, or something else starting with the same letter of the alphabet)
 - o A song to sing all together or teach a song to your children
 - o A book to be discovered and showed by the parent from the prison
 - o A book to read together that would be at home and at the prison
- Be careful of the level of tiredness of your child. Do not hesitate of shortening the meeting or making brakes to respect his rhythm.
- Ritualize the end of the meeting and mention when the next contact will take place. Be careful not to finish in a too sudden way, anticipate the end of the meeting.

After the Skype visit

In the prison

- Take the time to think about the next Skype visit. Are there things to change, to do differently? Does your child have wishes? Which moment did you enjoy particularly?
- Do not hesitate in sharing your feelings and questions with a trusted person.
- Prepare the next meeting, if possible, with the parent at home, by giving him a feedback, and with the child during the next contacts by telephone or written mail.

At home

- Take some time for a cuddle, stay available for your child's demands a few minutes after the meeting and in the following days
- Put words on your emotions and in function of his age, ask your child to talk about his emotions (for help, see the weather of emotions: <https://www.repr.ch/-meteo-des-emotions-119->)
- Answer the eventual questions of your child (information on the prison: <https://repr.ch/Alphabet-de-la-prison-114->)
- Talk about the next planned contacts with the parent in prison, that they are by phone, by letter or visit or by Skype
- Take some time to think about the next Skype visit, are they things to change, to do differently. Does your child have some wishes ?
- Prepare the next meeting with the parent in prison during a contact by giving a feedback of the last meeting
- Prepare the next meeting with your child in function of the last Skype meeting

You have questions, you need informations, advises. Do not hesitate in contacting the REPR professionals! We are here for you and your children.

REPR Team, avril 2020