Ways of connecting with your children or grandchildren when you’re far away
In August 2016, parenting author and educator Maggie Dent put a post on Facebook addressing a variety of ways to connect with children or grandchildren when you’re away from them.

DISCLAIMER: These tips are shared from our Facebook community – please do your own research when making choices for your family. Also please note we have left people’s entries largely unedited so there will be imperfections in grammar and spelling.

The original Facebook post:

**Maggie Dent**

FB community: can you share your wisdom? I recently heard from a pretty savvy grandma who is looking for different ways to connect with her grand daughter via technology. She says they’re already posting photos on the Tinybeans app, they use FaceTime and she’s downloaded a drawing program called Drawtime... we’d love to hear what you do to connect when you’re away from your children or grandkids. FIFOs, parents who are separated, family living overseas... please share your ideas whether they’re old school or using technology.

Main feedback provided from this post:

- Letters, parcels and packages delivered to letterboxes lights up faces and bridges distance between loved ones (it also encourages the return of mail)
- Pictures in frames, world maps and items of relevance that are linked to special people
- Personalised audio stories, recorded and sent via technology (ie Quality Time app)
- Private family groups on Facebook or Instagram for regular communication and sharing pictures
- Skype, webcams and live family interaction
- A variety of applications that are available for download that promote and assist communication between devices: Snap Chat, Cisco Spark, Seesaw, Tocomail, Words With Friends, Facetime, Touchnote, Wechat, Kin2kin and Viber.
- Catching up over the telephone and conversing through e-mail
Responses

Traditional communication channels:

Samantha Holtham
My old mum who is in England buys my daughter magazines and sends them in a parcel every few months. Grace is 12 now but loves receiving her own parcel. She then calls her nan to thank her and they have a chat and a laugh. It’s so special. Any relationship whichever kind of digital technology or otherwise is based on effort and sincerity. This has been going on for 10 years now. Obviously the magazine has changed. We’ve gone from Disney to Moshi monsters to YouTube mags. It’s just so special.

Rawinia Gregory
Writing an actual letter and including snippets and pictures and newspaper stories etc that she may like. Kids love to get mail! And so do grannies when the kids write back. My girls write to my 94 yr old great aunt, and she loves it and so do they. Sometimes my mum finds an interesting craft activity or newspaper article about an animal at the zoo and cuts it out and posts to the girls, such a fun surprise for them.

Krystle Carlson
We use tiny beans and Skype but it’s honestly not "real life" enough for an infant or toddler to build a relationship on - the grandparents are practically still strangers in that aspect.
What my 21 month old daughter loves is checking the mail and getting pictures and letters "from Nanna". She checks the letter box every morning and when there is something there (even if it's a bill) it's related to Nanna somehow. We have lots of conversations around where Nanna lives and have a map up in her room talking about how far it is and how the letters get to us.
The days we get mail opens up a whole day of activity where we spend lots of time doing drawings, printing photos and going to the post office to send them off. She just loves the letter box and putting things in the post. Hands on real life ways to connect are the best at this age for our family.
Skype is such an amazing thing but my daughter really doesn’t register who it is on the screen and is very disinterested, I feel this isn’t a true way to connect (especially with remote internet service being so delayed) but is more useful for the grand parents to watch her in action.
When she gets hard copy pictures of Nanna she points and cuddles them and puts them on the fridge and constantly says "hello nanna" whenever she walks by. Even if it’s just a picture of something Nana did that week sparks so much curiosity about what Nana does and who she is.
So I guess for now it's "old school" for us, hopefully in time we will be able to make more use of technology as a way to connect.

**Kezzah Wright**
Tech is great and in real time...but old Skool letters and printed pictures are keepsakes and treasures and photo books are awesome. These type of things let children share their joy with others and deepen connections.

**Caroline Jackson Pierce**
We're in Perth and family in UK - we put up special photos of all our individual family members with each of my two children and put them in a family photo frame in their bedrooms. When my now 6 and 8 year old were younger we went through a long period of every night saying good night to each of the family member (luckily not too big of a family, grandparents, aunties, uncles and cousins) and talking about what they remembered about them when we last saw them (usually every 15 months or so).

**Tim N Shannon Hardingham**
Snail mail! My kids get postcards, letters, magazine cuttings and stickers from their Nanni and Aunty and it's really special. It also then motivates them to draw or write back...purposeful writing (or pre-writing) for little people is always good!

**Carol Carlisle**
I agree with getting letters or little packages in the mail. My mum used to send my kids choccies in the post and they were so excited we still get lots of postcards

**Claire Helen**
Letters by hand, kept in a special box. My 91 year old nan send letters, cards, parcels and sometimes photos of her younger self. So treasured!

**Kendall Pickering**
Heading away from technology I agree with the posters who have said sending letters, postcards and photos in the mail is so special. I remember as a kid how exciting it was to get a letter from my Nana on her pretty paper or a postcard from my Grandad.

**Leeanne Handley**
Old school but these are cute, Wish U Were Here Dolls are for Parents away from their children, Grandparents, Kindi Comforters, Armed Forces, FIFO and angels in heaven!!
https://www.facebook.com/wishuwereheredolls/
Technology based communication channels:

Suze Leverington
My sons (7 and 8 years old) have always loved my mother-in-laws stories about their dad when he was younger, so she’s just downloaded an app or podcast thing where she can record 5 minute audio stories and send them to my boys to listen to at bedtime. They love it! (Quality Time is one such app—see their post below)

Love Quality Time
Thank you for recommending Love Quality Time. Maggie, I am one of the Founders of Quality Time and I would be more than happy to personally help this savvy Grandma get set up on our app. She can read picture books real-time within our app.
https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/quality-time/id925244513...

Carola Schwan
Our kids are 6 and 4 and when they Skype with their grandparents, they take over the living room. We have connected PC and Webcam to the big screen and the kids remodel the couch to campsites, shops or hospitals. We aren’t allowed to talk. It’s their time. Since both kids have known their grandparents this way from birth, there was never time of adjustment when they saw them in real life, once a year for both sets. And as the extended family partakes in this ritual, even our 18 month old nephew recognizes his cousins and us.

Belinda McGuire
My mum brought 2 of the same books and would read them to the girls via Skype. They could follow along with her. I found my girls bonded quicker with family when we did see them if we had skyped them regularly & it took longer with family we hadn’t skyped at all. The face, facial expressions, voice & just seeing them in their own environment helped.

Victoria Strodl
We made a Facebook group for our "family" & invited only family members. Everything shared is private to those in the group. We share videos, live videos, pictures and stories. It's fun to use hashtags to search later like #weeklypiccy #storytime

Bree Jackson
What about those toys that let you record a message on your phone through an app and the heart on the toy flashes when there’s a new message. They can snuggle them at bedtime or whenever. It lets you record for over 5 minutes I think so you can tell a story or sing a song.

Dianne Richards
I love the opportunity to Skype with my grandchildren. Love watching them draw, or eat or chat or race around the house. I do think any time either Skype, phone or mail are all are a good opportunity to catch up with them.

**Sharyn Thomson**
There is a great app called kin2kin that is like setting up Facebook but only has between family members so it’s safe, no advertising, no strangers and my son (7) loves it he can "like" photos from his gran, cousin etc and comment so it’s a family friendly way of facebooking

**Zoë Arpin**
We regularly Skype my mum (my son’s Grandmother) in the UK and they play peekaboo etc - his face always breaks into a big grin when she appears on the screen :)

**Rachael Holmes**
My mum has always read stories over Skype to my kids since we moved to Australia 4 yrs ago. She turns the camera around so they can see the pictures.

**Naomi Paulsen**
We use the app Wechat. You can send voice video pictures and stickers. Easy for kids and grandparents

**Chantelle Ransome**
There’s a good app called Quality Time if she would like to read a bedtime story with her grand child.

**Pauline Rocks**
If everyone has Apple devices you can share photos/videos on photo stream. It's very easy and others can "like" or comment on pics.
We live in WA but family are all in the UK and it's been amazing being able to post daily pics of our 3 year old.
FaceTime is also fabulous

**Jennifer King**
My son likes to make videos to send to his dad and I when he’s at the other parent’s house. He loves receiving the videos from us too and re-watches them over and over.
Also use FaceTime

**Nicola Sculthorpe**
What's app is good for having voice message chats if you're not able to Skype or FaceTime face to face.
Siân Angel
Whatsapp and Viber...I used to record a quick voice message for my friend’s baby when I was overseas and she’d play my messages... eventually the baby’s face would change expression when my voice message was played

Karen Cooley
FaceTime only and sharing videos/photos. But I’m really interested in the comments and ideas to use with my own family

Rebecca Sidoli
Touchnote app on your phone turn your own photos into postcards sent direct from your phone - inspite of technology nothing like holding that photo postcard in your hand

Roni Jones
With rules. We find snap chat so entertaining and a great way to have a laugh together even thousands of kilometres away.

Kristine Simpson
I use an app for school called seesaw but I see no reason this grandma couldn’t use the app to leave messages and post photos and videos

Deborah Guest
My kids play online checkers against their uncle who is on the east coast and sometimes I even phone him while they are playing and they chat while playing.

Megan Briers
My two boys, 12 and 14, Grandma and myself have a private Instagram account. We post photos, comment and chat about all sorts of things. The best thing is it allows everyone to express them selves in a private platform. We love it.

Natalie Storey
There is an email app for children that I have got for my kids called Tocomail. It allows the kids to send emails to people that you as the parent add to the 'safe list'.

Brooke Thomas
My older children use words with friends to compete against their nanny and granddad. They talk to each other through the message section. Not only gets them thinking about language but also another way to connect.

Kristen Russell
Cisco Spark. You can video chat, drop photos to one another and make up family chats.
Combinations of old school and technology approaches:

**Rose-Marie Warburton**
I'm not much help, as our young kids just call their dad (fifo - 21/7) on the land line. We always tag photos on fb with their dad.

**Rochelle Pilon**
My 4 yr old son FTs with Grandma in Canada weekly, but she also uses snail mail to send him the odd surprise envelope of something special! They also email each other (his generally consists of emojis) and his eyes light up when I tell him he has an email from Grandma! I make an effort to talk about her quite a lot so that she is present in his life despite the miles. He adores her!

**Felicity Stride**
I used to have a world map with photos of family who lived overseas & over east. Mostly use Facebook to keep in touch, send packages when we can.

**Mim Stephens-Merriman**
We purchased two of a few books, Nana had one we had the other. Every now and then Nana would call and read to the kids, it was gold.

**Amy Bailey**
We send snail mail... and snap chat!

**Dulcie Stephen**
I'm still the old school.......I write to my two granddaughters, sending the odd colouring, (mine) etc or postcards from Cambodia etc and the girls love retrieving them from the letter box at their front gate. Bit old fashioned I know....... Have recently created a Facebook page for grandsons in south Australia, which we hope will be successful. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins can see.