

# Virtual Options for Safely Connecting with Others

By [Robert Hugh Farley, M.S.](#)

## Introduction

The media today has inundated all of us with terms and reports such as: "Stay at Home," "Social Distancing," "Self-Quarantine," and, "Non-essential Businesses such as Bars and Restaurants Ordered Closed." So then, how does one connect with family members, friends, acquaintances, our colleagues from work, people with our ministries and the children who may be in our care (albeit remotely), while also doing it safely and still protecting youth?

For the typical "non-techie" person, it's going to take a little time and lots of patience, but in this world of ever-changing technology, it is possible to continue moving forward with the self-isolation dilemma while also connecting with others.

## Options for Connecting

The simplest option for one to connect is by making a phone call. Whether one has a landline phone or a cell phone, all one has to do is use the device's speakerphone option and any number of people can sit around the phone and easily join in a conversation.

Video-calling options are a fabulous way for people to stay connected with face-to-face capabilities while still practicing social distancing mandates.

If a person's computer, cell phone or tablet has an Internet or WIFI connection and a web-cam, that person can utilize the device for video-calls by using a free **Skype** application (app) download. Up to ten people can join in a video-call using Skype. If everyone is simply using Skype, the video-call is completely free if you each have WIFI, regardless of where you are located. Users only need to pay when using the premium Skype features like voice mail, texts or making voice calls to a landline or cell phones that don't also have the Skype app.

Another option is utilizing Apple's **FaceTime** app. If you and the person you're trying to connect with both have an Apple device like an iPhone, you can easily create a free FaceTime video-call with each other. One can also create a Group FaceTime with up to 32 Apple devices such as an iPhone, iPad or even a Mac. Unfortunately, this video-calling technique only works for the devices that support FaceTime, so Android users won't be able to join in the video conversation. Additionally, one may have to update the Apple iOS for the video-calling to work on their device.<sup>1</sup>

If one does not have an Apple device, one can download the free **Google Duo** app, which is a video-calling version of Apple's FaceTime. Similar to Skype, Google Duo works cross platforms, which means that unlike FaceTime, Android devices can connect with Apple devices using just one app. Duo at this time only supports eight people in a group video-call.

Another option for video-calling is the **Google Hangouts** app. This download, free in

the U.S. and Canada, allows members to initiate and participate in text, voice or video-calls, either one-on-one or in a group. The Hangouts apps are available for iOS and Android devices. You'll need a Google account, such as a Gmail account or Google Plus account, to use the Hangouts program. Up to 25 people can join a video Hangout.

The **Zoom** app, available for iOS and Android devices, is another option for remote conferencing or simple video-calling. Zoom allows free, one-on-one video calls or large groups. Unfortunately, the free video-calls can only last up to forty minutes in length. After that, there is a monthly subscription charge, but the premium video-calls can last up to 24 hours and support as many as 100 callers.

The most popular video-calling app for the socially-connected Generation Z (those born between 1996-2010) is the free download **Houseparty** app, available for iOS and Android devices. Although Houseparty is limited to only eight video-callers, a user can have several "rooms" open at a time, the idea being that one can go from room to room like at a real house party.

The **WhatsApp** download, available for iOS and Android devices, is popularly known worldwide for instant messaging, and is also free. WhatsApp also has a video-calling platform that allows up to four people to connect together at a time.

The **Facebook Messenger** app, available for iOS and Android devices, is another alternative for video-calling one-on-one or in groups.

This list of video-calling options is not completely exhaustive, because new options appear constantly. The best option for video calling depends on the type of device that a person uses.

### **Concerns for Trusted Adults**

As with any type of technology, a parent should monitor or at least be aware when a child or teen connects with others in a video-call. Just as some people will take advantage of a pandemic to price gouge, a child molester will use the pandemic as an opportunity to try to gain video access to a bored or lonely child or teen, who is forced to stay home, by offering companionship.

Another safety tip is for a parent to insist that parental permission is required for the download of each App on a mobile device. This is easily facilitated by a parent retaining the password that is required to install a new App on the device.<sup>2</sup>

Technology continues to rapidly change. Parents and all of us who are charged with protecting children must continue our efforts to stay abreast of the many new devices, software programs and the latest apps that may be used by young people and child molesters seeking to manipulate and sexually abuse children.