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The Role of Technology Comfort and Access in Grandparent-Grandchild Video-Chat Frequency
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During the COVID-19 era, important social relationships were mediated by screens. Families with infants and toddlers successfully used video-chat for familial connection, and video-chat frequency was associated with grandparents’ feelings of closeness to their grandchildren (Strouse et al., in press). Yet, much is unknown about factors that promote family video-chat. Grandparents/parents’ comfort with technology may play a role (Tarasuik & Kaufman, 2017).

Grandparents (n=863) and parents (n=864) of 0-to-6 year-olds completed self-report items about their technology experiences and demographics. To evaluate the contribution of technology comfort and barriers to grandparent-grandchild video-chat frequency, separate hierarchical ordinal regression models were run for parents and grandparents. Demographic information was entered in the first block, parent/grandparent technology access and comfort variables in the second block, and composites evaluating parent/grandparent social and technical barriers to video-chatting comprised the final block.

Each block increased model fit for both parties. In the full model, grandparents who were more comfortable with technology engaged in more video-chats with their grandchildren, (-2 Log Likelihood =2101.04, χ2(12)=53.71, p<.001). Explicit comfort ratings (p=.04), device ownership (p=.025), and technical barriers (p=.045) were significant predictors. Most parents (73.5%, vs. 46.8% of grandparents) reported being very comfortable with technology, and this factor did not predict video-chat frequency in the full model (p=.209). Results suggest that technology access and comfort are barriers to grandparent-grandchild virtual connections and have implications for the development and maintenance of extended family relationships across distance.