

# Talking to Families: Telehealth for Children with Special Needs

A tip sheet on involving the whole family in telehealth care for children with complex needs

## STEP 1: Prepare for your telehealth visit



Be familiar with each family's communication needs before the appointment starts:

- ▶ Confirm the family has internet access and a computer, smartphone, or tablet to attend the virtual visit
- ▶ Ask the family if they will need assistive technology to communicate during a telehealth appointment
- ▶ Book a slightly longer telehealth appointment to account for delays or pauses in communication with a child

### Extra Resource

Learn how to help families access telehealth services with the

[Family Advocate  
Telehealth Training course](#)

(<https://www.familytelehealthtraining.org/>)

## STEP 2: Speak directly to the child during the telehealth appointment



Ensure the child has an important role in their own health care:

- ▶ Greet the child by name and have everyone present introduce themselves
- ▶ Speak directly to the child during the virtual visit, even if the child is non-verbal
- ▶ Save time for the child to ask questions or share something that is important to them
- ▶ Involve the child in the decision making process whenever possible
- ▶ Recognize that some children may be distracted or unable to sit for an entire appointment

## STEP 3: Use child-friendly communication techniques



Keep the child engaged and comfortable so they can be more involved in their care:

- ▶ Take time to celebrate the child's successes and milestones
- ▶ Use props during the telehealth visit, such as toy animals, dolls, or colorful flashcards
- ▶ Encourage children to draw a picture while you chat with the parents or guardians and then share at the end of the telehealth appointment

## STEP 4: Make sure the family has a clear plan for follow-up care



Ongoing partnerships between doctors and families give children the best chance to thrive:

- ▶ Follow up with any prescriptions, lab or imaging orders, or referrals
- ▶ Book a follow-up appointment, if necessary
- ▶ Schedule an in-person visit if the child was unable to participate in a telehealth appointment
- ▶ Ask the family if they have suggestions for improvement during the next telehealth visit