USING TECH TO KEEP KIDS AND PARENTS CONNECTED

These instructions outline how you can use two free apps to keep kids and parents connected in a way that is:
- (a) fun and supportive of the parent-child relationship while a child is in substitute care;
- (b) convenient enough that kids could be engaging with their parents every day; and
- (c) if needed, keeps resource families' identifying and/or contact information private.

These instructions aren't meant as a substitute for in-person family time or even real-time virtual or phone contact. Rather, these ideas are meant to supplement what is already being provided.

The main app we're looking at is called "Marco Polo." You can use this app to record video messages and then send those messages to a friend. You can add fun voice or picture effects to your video and even write or draw on the image! Once sent, your friend can view at any time; respond during the video by adding emoji or other reactions; record video reactions that embed in your video and that you can view later; and reply with their own video message on their own time.

So how does this help parents and kids?
A parent could record him- or herself, for example, reading from a picture book; telling a story; singing a song; sending a good night message; or doing a craft activity that the child could do on her own time. Use the text function to explore the alphabet, or the doodle function to name and play with shapes. The resource family can even record the child's reaction to the video and send it back to the parent, all from within the app. Many fun options to engage!

Ingredients
Parent and resource family will each need:
1. A smart phone connected to Wi-Fi and/or cellular data
2. Working phone number
3. Email address

If the resource family needs to keep identifying information and/or their phone number private, they will also need:
1. A Gmail account
2. A Google Voice account (see page 2)

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Instructions
1. Download the Marco Polo app. Information about the app and download links are available online at https://www.marcopolo.me/, or in the app store.

2. Set up your account. Marco Polo requires new users to input a first and last name, phone number, and email address.

3. Start a New Chat:
   - To navigate to the "New Chat" page, click the "+" sign in the top right corner, next to the "Marco Polo" header.
   - To start a New Chat, you must search for the other user by typing in their phone number (click "Enter a Phone Number").

If there is a need for the resource family not to share their personal phone number, they can set up a Google Voice number (page 2).

4. Both the parent and resource family can test out the app and learn more about its features by chatting with the "Polo Bot" before recording or sending any messages to one another. The social worker could also be available to help the parent and resource family test out the app by sending the worker messages.

5. Saving messages? Folks might also want to review the offerings of the apps "Privacy Policy."

   - Messages are automatically saved, but users can choose to restrict people from saving messages they've sent.

Google Voice

Google Voice is an app for your smart phone, tablet, or desktop computer. It is a way to have a separate phone number for texting, calling, and voicemail. You can choose to have calls forwarded to your cell phone or to a landline. You can also set the app to "Do Not Disturb" when you do not want to be notified about calls or text messages.

Texts received through Google Voice can be stored on the app, so they don't mix with your personal text messages. Voicemail works the same way.

You do have to have a Gmail account in order to set it up.

More information is available online at https://voice.google.com/u/0/signup.

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