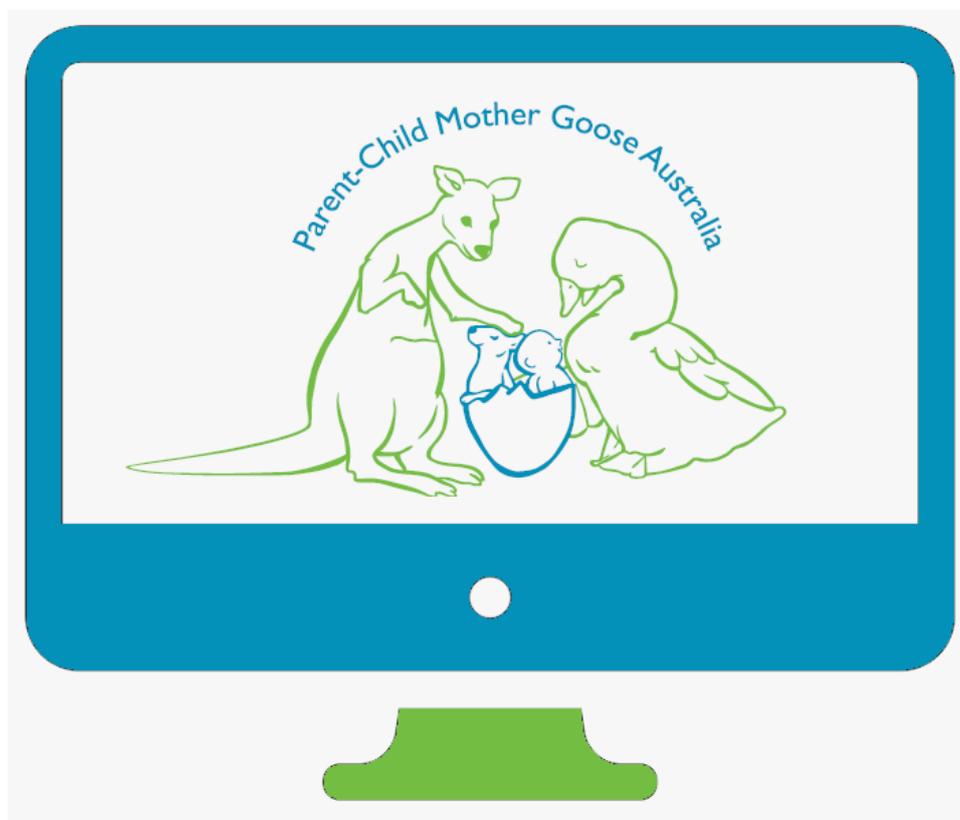


## Tips for running Parent-Child Mother Goose online



The following tips originally appeared as a sequence of posts on the Parent-Child Mother Goose Australia Facebook page.

### Tip 1: Welcome

It's important for parents and children to feel both welcome and known at every program session.

When my co-facilitator and I meet our Parent-Child Mother Goose group face-to-face, we provide name tags for parents and children. Online, we achieve a similar effect by getting participants to name themselves and their children in Zoom. To begin with, we did this naming ourselves, following a protocol where we listed adult names first, followed by children's names. We have found that over time participants have learned to name themselves, but we are always ready to help if needed.

When our group met face-to-face, we always started by going around the circle and having all adults (and children if could) say hello and tell us their names. When meeting online, there is no physical circle to give an order to proceeding, so we invite families in turn to unmute and

introduce themselves and their children. Children join in if they can, and we celebrate the occasion when they start to do so.

When we met face-to-face, we always began with the same Welcome song, and the same acknowledgement of Country (using the Playschool acknowledgement). One of the many benefits of having a set routine like this is that it helps to relax both adults and children, who can confidently join in near the beginning even if they're running late and are feeling stressed.

When meeting online, we follow the same principle, although we have changed our Welcome song from "Tell us what your names are" to "Hello, hello" because we have found that having families mute and unmute (to tell us what their names are) interrupts the rhythm of the song (and so detracts from the pleasure of singing it).

## **Tip 2: Teaching new rhymes and songs**

Whether we're working with a group face-to-face or online, we always use the same method for teaching new songs and rhymes.

We introduce that material line by line, highlighting whatever makes it easy to learn. Sometimes that will be rhyme. Sometimes it will be repetition. Sometimes the rhyme or song will feature opposites, like 'up' and 'down', or 'in' and 'out'. Sometimes a tune will be easy to learn because it is the same as another well-known song.

The facilitator also mentions particular benefits of the new song or rhyme for little children's development. For example, we may highlight the use of active verbs in a song. The vocabulary of little children who are learning to speak often consists mostly of nouns which they use in one word utterances ("Mumma", "dog", "car"). Acquiring verbs helps them combine two words together ("Mumma clap", "dog woof", "car go"), greatly increasing their expressive repertoire.

Essentially we always follow the same approach here, regardless of whether we're meeting as a group via Zoom or Webex, or face-to-face.

## **Tip 3: A child's centre of attention**

In face-to-face sessions, it's good practice to remind parents that children who are socially ready will often prefer to look into the circle, rather than into their parent's or carer's face.

When a child does this in a face-to-face group, we may reassure parents that this is developmentally appropriate

behaviour. At the same time, we remind parents that when the time is right - at home, or somewhere else, when there are no other distractions - enormous benefits flow from a deep, shared eye gaze between parent and child, in loving, face-to-face interaction. Such occasions are the perfect time to share together their child's favourite songs, rhymes or stories.

When we meet as an online Parent-Child Mother Goose group, it is natural that children who are socially ready will be drawn to look at the screen, rather than at their parent or carer. The same guidelines apply here for facilitators as when we meet face-to-face. We reassure parents that this is developmentally appropriate social behaviour, but remind them, too, of the benefits of sharing songs, rhymes and stories in joyful, loving eye contact.

#### **Tip 4: Giving positive feedback**

Parent-Child Mother Goose is a 'strength-based' model, where facilitators observe and comment on joyous interactions between parents or carers and their children, particularly supporting parents who may be vulnerable for different reasons.

Examples of good practice include commenting on the delightful way an adult has gazed deeply into their child's eyes while learning a face-massage rhyme, or has elicited squeals of delight through a 'bounce' rhyme. We may notice instances of a baby or child's language, speech, listening or social awareness developing, and give positive feedback about these changes to the parent or care-giver. This kind of feedback can be very reassuring (for example, if a parent has some concerns about their child's development, which they may or may not have expressed out loud).

In a face-to-face setting, it can be easier to make these kinds of observations than when we're working online. We're more likely to notice children talking or gesturing or localizing sound because we can hear these sounds ourselves. Giving feedback feels more natural.

When we're leading songs and rhymes online, we can't hear others because they need to be muted. Nevertheless, with practice, we can hone our observational skills.

In our own online groups, we've found it helpful to encourage parents and care givers every week to sing and chant along with us (so children can hear their voices), and when we observe them joining in, we always comment positively.

We also encourage parents and care givers to unmute from time to time to share instances where their child has joined in

with their own voices or gestures or signs. When this happens we celebrate, and repeat the rhyme or song.

At the end of our online sessions, we encourage parents to stay online for a few extra minutes if they wish, to tell us what material they and their children enjoy the most. We'll typically include this material in the following week's program, where we'll introduce it by saying something like "Now we're going to do 'Zoom, Zoom', as requested by Suze and Nguyen".

Even working online, there are still many ways of giving positive reinforcement like this to parents and caregivers.

## **Tip 5: Building a community culture**

In our face-to-face groups, we aim both to model and build a culture that is welcoming, supportive and inclusive to all. For some of our most vulnerable families, the sense of belonging to such a community may be quite new. It is our intention that over time, the principle that 'it takes a village to raise a child' will become a fundamental feature of our group's culture. It is wonderful to see parents quickly adopting the way facilitators notice and comment when a child reaches a new stage of development — for example, crawling or walking, starting to make word approximations, or (in my own field) keeping their hearing aids in, or their cochlear implant processors on.

In keeping with this 'village' ethos, parents in a face-to-face group soon get to know each other, welcoming each other at the start of sessions, and staying back afterwards for a chat. Many families who have attended P-CMG sessions at Taralye, I know, have made long-term friendships through this group, and have remained in contact long after their children have left Taralye.

It will definitely be harder to build an equivalent sense of community online, but we still work towards this wherever we can. It is important to remind ourselves of the welcoming, supportive and inclusive culture that we, as co-facilitators, are modelling. How does that look online? It will entail smiling faces, allowing time to welcome all families individually, asking them for favourite material, asking parents to let you know new instances of development and communication attempts. We also invite families to join us ten minutes ahead of our nominal starting time for a group chat, and we invite them to stay on after the formal 'end' of each session. Some families take up these invitations, but not as many do as when we meet face-to-face. However, the will is clearly there. Many families who have met each other only online in my own group have expressed a desire to get together physically once COVID restrictions are eased.

It's worth bearing in mind that without online meetings, this sense of supportive and positive community could not have developed at all. And families who have attended our online sessions have certainly developed a positive sense of connection with our group facilitators.

## **Tip 6: Security and privacy**

A Parent-Child Mother Goose session should feel like a safe and nurturing place for all participants, regardless of whether that session takes place face-to-face or online.

When delivering a face-to-face program, it's best to use a room that is away from public gaze. This is especially important for participants who are vulnerable. The program I co-facilitated face-to-face before it went online took place in a room near a reception desk that had its own small foyer where we were able to set up a register and name tags. Facilitators always met and welcomed families as they arrived and asked them to sign in. We asked that they did not record the session, or take photos of other participants.

When meeting online, it is also vital to consider security. To minimise the risk of an unwanted person joining our online meetings, we ask group members not to share the Zoom link we send them with anyone else (even other family members), and we activate Zoom's 'waiting room' feature for every meeting. If participants do want to invite another family member or friend to join the group, we ask them to contact one of the program facilitators with the details of the person to be invited. The facilitator then contacts that person and sends them the meeting link. We ask all participants to identify their device (computer, tablet or phone) with their own name, so that we can identify them in the Zoom waiting room and admit them.

By default, the online platform we use in our programs (Zoom) does not allow meeting participants to record sessions. We are aware, however, that some third party apps do allow sound and/or picture recording of a Zoom meeting to occur without the knowledge of others attending a meeting. Whenever we meet online, we ask (and remind) families not to take photos, and not to record sessions, so as to protect the privacy of all participants.

Regardless of whether we are meeting face-to-face or online, there will often be times when we need to send the same email to many group participants. When we do so, we always send that email in a way that ensures no recipient can see the email address or name of others receiving the same email. We do that by addressing the email to all recipients in our

email program's bcc (blind copy) field. Other email programs may achieve a similar effect in other ways.

## **Tip 7: Special consideration for suitable material when delivering a program online**

At the beginning of a face-to-face or online program, we always invite families (adults as well as children, once they're able) to introduce themselves and also to request their favourite songs and rhymes. There can be nothing more engaging than songs and rhymes specifically requested by adults and/or children, and giving children an opportunity to participate actively in their own learning is an essential best practice.

Repetition is also essential to the underlying principles of P-CMG, and facilitators routinely use repetition when introducing new material. Repetition helps both adults and children to learn songs, rhymes and actions, and it's best practice to encourage families to ask for repetition themselves. When families are up dancing or moving around the room, however, it's often hard for them to come to the computer and unmute in so as to ask for an item again.

To overcome this hurdle, we have taught everyone in our online group the Auslan signs for 'again' and 'more.' They're super easy to learn, and families enjoy using them. You can find short videos teaching these signs at the Auslan Sign Bank. For example, here is the Auslan sign for 'again': <http://www.auslan.org.au/dictionary/words/again-1.html>

We have found that some material works especially well online, creating a great sense of fun and anticipation. For example, in "Incy wincy spider", the lead facilitator can get a great effect by bringing their hands very close to the camera. "Here comes the Ticklebird" is another favourite that works very well with this treatment.

In "Zoom Zoom Zoom" it can be really effective to bob down almost out of sight, with just one hand showing on the screen, before starting the countdown.

Songs that involve moving in towards the camera then back out again are great fun too (for example, "Leo the Lion", "Muffin Man" and "Hokey Pokey").

Stories that feature lots of facial expressions or clear gestures such as "Three Little Pigs" and "Mr Wiggle and Mr Waggle" work particularly well online. Do take a look at the versions at <https://jbrary.com/>. "The Story of the Hand", available on the Parent-Child Mother Goose Australia Facebook page is another.

Before telling a story on Zoom, ask families to choose  
“Speaker View” so they will see the story being told up close.

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