

## How to teach people with dementia to use video calling

People with dementia still have a lot of learning capacity. Also, people with advanced dementia still can learn things. For example, controlling tablets and iPads by themselves. Functions that are often used by people with dementia – even if they live in a nursing home – are:

- Watching photos
- Listening to their favourite music
- Playing simple computer games
- Video calling with family members
- E-mailing; an increasing group of people with dementia who are living at home are using email, in a nursing home it is less common to use.

The usage of a tablet by people with dementia, will increase quality of life and decrease isolation.

### Learning form: Operant Learning Theory

Daily practice and scientific research show that there are four learning forms that suit people with dementia. In all forms, the memory part of the brain is used in a limited way.

When teaching the use of tablets to people with dementia, the learning form operant learning is the most important one. Operant learning is based on getting success experiences (with rewards). There is a short movie with more explanation on the site:

[www.opnieuwgeleerdoudgedaan.nl](http://www.opnieuwgeleerdoudgedaan.nl)<sup>1</sup>. Also, there are a couple of movies with examples of learning processes used by people with dementia.

### Preparation by carers or other helpers

1. Make sure the home screen of the tablet has as few as possible pictograms and programs. Often elderly use the old tablets of family members. (Grand)children can set up an almost empty home screen, before turning over the tablet to elderly.
2. Plan the first call with a relative or close friend.
3. Put the tablet on a stand on the table, to avoid the screen being touched unintendedly during the call. Have a family member provide such a stand.
4. Make sure that the volume is up, so that the elderly can hear the other caller loud and clear.

### Step-by-step

- Start with teaching an elderly person how to take a call with the tablet. So, where do you need to touch the screen to take a call? With Skype, you just need to push a button which appears on the screen. With Facetime, you need to swipe over the screen until arrows appear.

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<sup>1</sup> This site is in Dutch. Try Google Translate or search for other sites on operant learning/conditioning.

- Make sure the first calls are short, so that the 'taking the call' procedure can be repeated. Most of the people with dementia will know how to take the call after a couple of times trying.
- Make sure that the first days, the time of the calls is set when the family calls. This creates the power of repetition. Keep in mind not to pick times that are very busy for the elderly, for example during meals.

If needed, put a note with instructions near the tablet computer as a reminder. But be aware, don't make the instructions not too long.

When a person is familiar with the principle of taking a call, you may consider teaching him/her how to make a videocall. How to do that:

- Make sure the icon of the videocall program is visible on the home screen.
- Make sure that there is just a limited group of people (with clear pictures) in the contact list.
- Push, together with the person, on the name and/or photo. Make sure that the person who receives the call expects to be called. The most important part of the learning process is still the success experience/reward of the person with dementia. If the call isn't answered, this gives a failure experience, and is counterproductive.
- Repeat this process a few times, and later also a few times a day. Also, in this case, it could be that this process is soon possible without a caregiver or other helpers present.

### **Challenging the people with dementia:**

Video calling can give nice moments for both people with dementia and their families. It is also important that people with dementia are stimulated to activity/exercise during a video call. This helps the functioning of the body and brains. Examples are clapping along with a song, signing games, dancing while sitting in a chair, etc. No doubt, there is a lot of creativity in each family!

### **Points of attention in the communication with people with dementia:**

- ✓ Avoid the word computer. People with dementia often have performance anxiety. The word computer can lead to performance anxiety or incomprehension. Talk about 'we are going to talk to...' A lot of people with dementia don't even notice that they are talking through a screen, and that is okay!
- ✓ If a person with dementia can still use his/her phone, delegate the guidance to family members via the phone, instead of the carer being present in person.
- ✓ As carer/other helper, don't try to be present every time the person with dementia is making a call. A lot of people with dementia may feel taken care of, and will call less because of that.
- ✓ Make sure that people with dementia feel/experience the consequences of making a call: 'I push on the screen, and then I can have a nice conversation with a nice person, and we can do nice things together'.
- ✓ Avoid the experience of failure; keep it simple!