

## PAT Volunteer Virtual Read2Dogs Help Guide

### What is Virtual Read2Dogs?

Our Virtual Read2Dogs (R2D) scheme allows a child to read to a PAT Volunteer and their pet whether they are at school or at home. This service takes place via video conferencing using a variety of equipment such as a desktop computer, laptop or even a tablet. These sessions must always be supervised by either a teacher or parent/guardian.

### How do I take part in a virtual visit?

The school will email you a link to the video conference for a given date and time. The majority of schools use software such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, but other video conferencing software exists such as Skype.

In most situations, you only need to click the link the school sends to access the call through your web browser or you may prefer to download and install the software app. Either of these two options are free of charge. If you are likely to be joining more than one session over a period of time, it probably makes sense to download the app as this makes future calls quicker to join.

### Why have a virtual service?

The Virtual R2D service was developed during the first Covid-19 lockdown in response to schools across the UK being closed. Overnight children of all ages had little to no access to school-based education, and there are particular concerns about the impact this is having on primary school-aged children and their development in literacy and social skills.

### What are the benefits of a virtual service?

- PAT Volunteers can connect with a school regardless of their location in the country.
- Volunteers, schools and pupils can connect regardless of their local lockdown situation or indeed if they are shielding.
- This scheme provides flexibility for individual or group interactions.

### And the challenges?

- Children will have no direct physical contact with the dog. However, research has proved that viewing an animal remotely still has its benefits, particularly if that pet is familiar to a child.
- There is a greater emphasis on the volunteer's skills to keep the child engaged – our useful tips should help.
- There is a greater emphasis on the volunteer to build a rapport with the child and make detailed arrangements with the school. However, once this is done, both the child and the volunteer will benefit greatly.

For further information please contact the Pets As Therapy Head Office, Tel: **01865 671440**  
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## Useful Hints and Tips for PAT Volunteers

- It may be beneficial to have a brief chat with the teacher before a Virtual session to gain any useful information on the child that might support communication during the reading exercise.
- Please arrange your Zoom session in a quiet room with no household passers-by or distracting noise.
- Please be punctual for your Virtual R2D session, in order to save the child from becoming anxious and difficult to engage.
- Please read the chosen book in advance of the session so you are familiar with the text. This will help with possible prompts or shared reading.
- Please ensure that the chosen book is to hand during the Virtual session.
- Always greet the child and introduce yourself and your pet and ensure you both appear excited to be meeting the child.
- When joining the call, do carry out a quick sound check to make sure the child can hear you clearly.
- Try and engage your dog in dialogue to avoid the session being just an adult reading with a child. For example, say 'Doug [the dog] is so excited to know what happens next,' or 'Look at Doug's excited face, do you think Doug might be looking forward to hearing a story?'
- If a child looks anxious, share the reading so as not to put child on the spot. If the child is quiet, ask them to use a big strong voice so that the dog is able to hear.
- After the book is completed, have a brief conversation with the child about the story and thank the child for taking part. Then encourage them to say goodbye to your dog, say goodbye yourself and leave the video conferencing session.

## Common Questions from PAT Volunteers

### Q. How do I set up a video conferencing session?

A. As a PAT Volunteer, it's not your responsibility to set up the sessions, this should always be the school's responsibility. You can access the sessions by clicking on a link that the school will send to you, via email, in advance of the session.

### Q. Do I need to pay for video conferencing software?

A. No. As you are not the person initiating the calls, you do not need to pay for any software. You should only need to click on a link sent to you by the school which will likely be emailed to you in advance of the session. This link will either allow you to join the session via your web browser or it will ask you to download an app (application) to your device (free of charge) to access the sessions.

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**Q. Can I join the calls on my smartphone?**

A. We are asking all PAT Volunteers to join the meetings from either a desktop PC, laptop or tablet. This will enable you to better engage with the child as your hands won't be holding a phone. We also ask that you remain in one place for the Virtual session's duration. If you use a smartphone, there's a potential risk that you'll walk around your home which may be distracting. If you have no other option and must use a smartphone, please ensure that it's placed on a secure stand and you have a static background that will not distract the child.

**Q. What do I do if the responsible adult sitting with the child leaves the room?**

A. We make it very clear that to protect everyone involved, the responsible adult – whether that is the teacher/teaching assistant at school or the parent/guardian at home – must stay visible throughout the Virtual session. If the parent or teacher moves out of sight, then end the session.

Please click these links to view demonstration videos of how to access video conferencing invitations:

How to join a Zoom session video tutorial: [youtu.be/4Bjgn8Wqi1w](https://youtu.be/4Bjgn8Wqi1w)

How to join a Teams session video tutorial: [youtu.be/W437Rc-bMFw](https://youtu.be/W437Rc-bMFw)

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