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How to make a good video clip...

Be My Parent online offers a great opportunity to show a more rounded profile of a child, including video clips. Short of having Steven Spielberg at your disposal, the following tips outlining what to cover, what to avoid, what works and what doesn't, might help you if you're making a video clip for the first time.

⇒ Remember

Video clips for *Be My Parent online* must be as non-identifying as possible for reasons of confidentiality, so don't ask a child to say their full name or ask them where they live, which school they go to, their date of birth etc. For the same reason, children should not be filmed in school uniform. Make sure there are no street or place names in the background. The clip should not include any information identifying the photographer or filmmaker so as to protect the identity of the child.

Please make sure that your film does not include other people (adults or children) – apart from foster carers or siblings – as anyone appearing in the film will need to give their consent to be filmed and for the clip to appear on the Be My Parent website.

● Getting the best out of the children

It's obviously important that the children feel comfortable with the camera so it's worth spending some time beforehand letting them play with it, show them the LCD screen so they can see themselves on it, and generally make them feel like they are a part of the whole experience.

When filming a child speaking, be sure to film whole sentences – it's good to wait 5–7 seconds after the child has finished a thought ... just in case they have more to say! Avoid asking closed questions which elicit a 'yes' or 'no' response and not much else; try more open questions such as 'tell me about ...', 'what's it like to ...' etc. Remember who these video clips are aimed at – try and get the child to speak for him/herself rather than putting words in his/her mouth.

● Show the child in a range of situations

For instance, playing, eating, painting, or doing homework, but be aware of what is appropriate and what is not (e.g. in the bath). Similarly, make sure the child is wearing appropriate clothing – no skimpy clothing or nightwear. If filming a group of brothers or sisters, try and show the children individually as well as interacting within the group.

If a child is disabled or needs medical interventions, film situations which show how the child copes with ordinary everyday life. For example, a child with cerebral palsy may not necessarily be a wheelchair user – show him/her in a situation such as a playground to illustrate how well he/she can walk or cope with such an environment.

Similarly, if a child has a gastrostomy tube, think about filming that procedure – the actual reality of feeding a child through a tube may well be much easier than people realise. Remember it is very different seeing the child rather than reading about him/her on the page – the phrases 'cerebral palsy' and 'gastrostomy tube' are quite emotive words and can conjure up images that may not necessarily concur with the reality.

Don't be afraid to film tantrums and strops! If a child regularly has tantrums – for example, over food – film that, and show how the foster carer deals with it. You could also combine this with a voiceover of the foster carer explaining how often this happens, whether it's getting better etc. Reading that a child is 'difficult with food' and then seeing the reality and realising that it is manageable may make all the difference to a prospective adopter or foster carer making that initial enquiry.

- **Voiceovers**

Think of using voiceovers of the foster carer talking about the child. This is a particularly useful device with babies who may not be particularly mobile or vocal yet. Or, as in the scenario above, use a voiceover to explain a child's behaviour and how to manage the tantrums, anger or emotions of this particular child.

- **Using music**

Bear in mind that, if you use music, copyright will need to have been cleared by yourself.

- **Length of clip**

The video clip should be 3–5 minutes long for a single child and up to 7 minutes for a sibling group.

Some technical dos and don'ts

Before you start filming, check:

- ✓ that the batteries are fully charged
- ✓ that the video tape is in the camera
- ✓ the focus
- ✓ that you have chosen a suitable environment, i.e. somewhere quiet and not backlit.

🔊 **Sound/Noise**

Try and film somewhere quiet so the children can be heard clearly. Be aware of background noises e.g. television, noisy toys, clocks, passing traffic, music etc. If the film has to be edited be aware it's easier to edit birdsong, for example, than music.

If you are filming outside on a windy day the microphone will pick up the noise of the wind and will make everything else more difficult to hear so it may be a good idea to use these images, but with a voiceover.

Try and get the microphone as close to the children as possible and, if using a separate microphone, keep it out of shot. If the camera has an inbuilt microphone remember it is only a few inches away from your mouth so be aware of heavy breathing!

🔦 **Light**

If you're in a dark room with no lighting, all that your camera will pick up is black stuff. Film with the light behind you wherever possible. Film away from windows and other forms of intense background light. Be aware of reflected light from windows, mirrors, even glasses.

🎥 **Filming techniques**

Keep the camera steady! If you're not using a tripod, hold the camera steady – e.g. use a table or something that will stop your hands from wobbling. Cupping the camera rather than using the handslings can reduce movement.

🎥 **Framing the shot**

- ✓ Headroom – do not leave too much room above a person's head. As a rough guide, in close up shots the child's eyes should be two thirds up the screen. If you don't have enough headroom it will look as if the child is being crushed. Don't cut off heads!
- ✓ Noseroom – give the child room to breathe and show the viewer the space that the child is looking into e.g. if the child is looking to screen right then he/she should be placed screen left otherwise he will look confined and restricted, as well as feeling claustrophobic for the viewer.
- ✓ Leadroom – if the child is moving give them some lead room to run into otherwise it will look as if he/she is pushing the frame of the camera as they move. Children move quickly so bear this in mind!

📽 **Close ups** – e.g. full face. One problem that can arise is that if the child moves it can ruin the shot. Don't try and move the camera with them; either zoom out or just let them move in and out of the shot.

📽 **Zoom**

Use sparingly! As a rule of thumb, if your eyes can't do it, you shouldn't do it. Zooming can be hard to edit and hard to watch. If you do have to use a zoom, take more time than you think you need. You would normally zoom in or out but not both – and you definitely need a steady hand!

📽 **Panning**

This is when you move the camera horizontally from left to right or vice versa. Pan slowly – it is important that the viewer has a chance to understand what they are seeing. When filming moving subjects, e.g. a child running, give them good 'nose' room and allow them to move into the space.

📽 **Hold your shots**

One of the most common errors for all camera users is not holding shots for long enough. Always film a few seconds extra before and after the shot you need. Allow an action to complete before you cut it.

📽 **Keep it simple**

Avoid using special effects – remember, the focus is on the child.

⇒ **And finally... be picky!**

Be selective with your camera shots – think about how your filming will help relay the essence of the child. The more footage you have, the longer it will take to edit.

Technical specifications

Please provide the file as a QuickTime, WMV or MPEG file, maximum 35Mb. The output dimensions should be approximately 320x240 pixels.

Please send the video clip to us at the address below, either on a CD or DVD. We regret that we cannot accept VHS tapes. Please have any video clip of VHS transferred onto CD or DVD before sending it to us.

If the video clip does not meet the Be My Parent standards of privacy and security of the child, or of image quality, we may ask you to edit or replace it, or we may decide not to use it if you are unable to provide a suitable alternative.

You may find it helpful to view the sample video produced by Glocal Films on our website: www.bemyparent.org.uk

We hope you have found these guidelines informative and helpful. If you have any further questions to ask please do not hesitate to call and we can discuss your ideas further.

**Be My Parent
Saffron House, 3rd Floor
6–10 Kirby Street
London EC1N 8TS**

**Email: bmp@baaf.org.uk
Tel: 020 7421 2666/5/4
www.bemyparent.org.uk**



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