

How to stay connected and keep seniors safe during COVID-19

Seniors are being hit hard by COVID-19. According to the CDC, 8 out of 10 U.S. COVID-19 deaths are adults 65+ and 43% of deaths are linked to nursing homes. People over 65 years are more likely to have underlying conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes or respiratory illness which raise the risk of COVID-19 and death from COVID-19. If you or a loved one has been impacted by COVID-19, consider these practical tips to stay connected and safe during the pandemic.

Stay connected

Staying at home and avoiding crowds is necessary to prevent the spread of coronavirus, but it can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Hard times are when people need their loved ones the most, and not being allowed to see each other in person can take a toll. If you or a loved one is starting to feel the effects of being confined at home, try these suggestions for connecting with others during the outbreak.

- **Check-in often** by phone, email, text, video chat, letters, etc.
- **Structure your conversations with some activities**—You might try engaging your loved ones in activities, such as playing a trivia game, singing songs together or asking them to recount pleasant memories from the past. For those who have a history of trauma, it is the best to avoid questions that trigger painful memories and focus on happier chapters in their lives.
- **Schedule a window visit**—“Meet” with your loved one through a window on the ground floor. You can chat—almost in person—and share smiles, laughs and a touch through the glass. For a special occasion, like a birthday or holiday, handmade signs are an extra special sight, too.
- **Play games online together**—Most video game systems have multiplayer games available. These are a great way to connect with other people while keeping a safe distance.
- **Create a book club**—Another way you can stay connected is by reading the same book and scheduling time once every few days to have a phone call to talk about the book you are reading. This is a good way for the both of you to spend your time while social distancing, and it also gives you something to connect on. This isn't limited to just you and your loved one, have your whole family join in!
- **Make a photo book**—Create a picture book with recent and past photos of what you and the family have been up to. It can be as simple as a few pages printed on your home printer and stapled together or a poster board assortment. Include captions identifying family members and friends, with a small description. Most facilities will accept envelopes or packages at the front desk and deliver to the room if you want to drop off in person.

Recognize when help may be needed

Even before COVID-19, many older adults struggled with feelings of loneliness, isolation and depression. Major life changes or challenges, such as the pandemic, can trigger depression.

Symptoms of depression

- Confusion and forgetfulness
- Not keeping in touch with friends and loved ones
- Changes in sleep or eating habits
- Irritability
- Low energy
- Suicidal thoughts or ideations

What you can do

- Talk to your loved one
- Do not get upset with them
- Encourage them to seek help
- Encourage them to stay active and exercise, while keeping a safe social distance
- Make sure they are taking medications correctly
- Find out what is available to them through their insurance and/or long-term care facility

Finding ways to stay connected with others during the coronavirus can be more challenging as an older adult. Try using these strategies to feel less isolated and to stay connected with loved ones and others around the world.

Help is available. Your program is completely confidential and here to help you and your household members 24/7/365. No situation is too big or too small. Give us a call or visit your program website to get started.

Sources:

- "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html.*
- *Healthwise, Depression in Older Adults, January 31, 2020*
- *The New York Times. "More Than 40% of U.S. Coronavirus Deaths Are Linked to Nursing Homes." The New York Times, The New York Times, 27 June 2020, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-nursing-homes.html.*