

6 Creative Ways to Communicate While Maintaining Social Distancing with Seniors



To slow the spread of the coronavirus and protect your senior loved ones, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is urging citizens to practice “social distancing.” The CDC requests individuals to maintain at least a six-foot distance between people, avoid crowds, cancel events, and stay away from sick people. Some states are even ordering residents to “shelter in place.”

Although social distancing may reduce the risk that older adults face from the coronavirus, it can leave seniors vulnerable to social isolation. Feelings of loneliness and social isolation in seniors are linked to depression, declining physical health, and increased stress and cognitive changes. Conversely, seniors who are socially active receive many physical and emotional benefits.

Although you may not be able to visit and spend quality time with your elderly loved ones, you can still stay in touch while protecting your senior from the coronavirus. Here are some creative ways for seniors to stay active and keep communicating while maintaining social distance:

1

Phone and Video Calls

Call your elderly loved ones a few times a day to reduce feelings of social isolation. Share stories, tell jokes, solve riddles, play simple games, or read aloud with them. If possible, take advantage of video call applications such as FaceTime or Skype and connect multiple family members on the same call. Hearing loved one's voices and seeing their faces will brighten your beloved senior's day.



2

Send Letters

Give your elderly loved one a pleasant surprise by mailing letters. Let them know you are thinking of them and that they are dear to you. Don't limit your correspondence to just a written letter. Send pressed flowers, burned CDs, printed photos, or even a grandchild's art project to surprise your senior with a wonderful gift.



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3 Virtual group meetings, events, or classes

In recent weeks, many religious organizations, senior centers, exercise studios, and other businesses and community groups have converted to a virtual format and are now hosting classes, events, and meetings using Google Hangouts, Zoom, FaceTime, YouTube, and other Internet-based platforms. Do some research and help your senior loved one connect virtually with his or her favorite activities or community groups—and consider participating together, if possible. In addition to providing some personal enrichment and entertainment, mutual participation provides the opportunity to discuss the event afterwards with your senior.

You may need to help your senior loved one with verbal instructions over the phone to install software or applications, access websites, or log onto sites. Although the technology may seem intimidating to the elderly unfamiliar to using it, remind your senior that keeping to normal routines as much as possible and looking forward to fun activities will help to alleviate stress and promote a feeling of belonging despite not being able to participate in person.



4 Book and movie groups

Pick a book or movie together to read or watch and, then, have a discussion about it over the phone or via video chat. Revisit a classic that both you and your loved one enjoyed in the past or use this opportunity to discover a book or movie neither of you have previously read or seen. Also consider audio books or podcasts that you both can enjoy. Media is a great escape, and many seniors will relish the opportunity to exercise their minds by reading and having engaging conversations with their family and friends.



5 Amazon Alexa and Constant Companion

To help keep seniors safe and connected to their communities, Visiting Angels® offers Constant Companion, a proprietary system that uses Amazon Alexa to help seniors live a safe and independent life. Constant Companion responds to voice-activated medical alerts and summons help ASAP. It does not require any wearable devices and can call or send voice messages to loved ones. Constant Companion also includes an optional video chat feature and can read audio books, play games, and give medication reminders to your senior.



6 Have supplies delivered

With many seniors staying home, running out of food or medications is a real risk. Show your loved one that you are still thinking of them even if you are not able to be together right now by ordering groceries or meal deliveries to their home.



Keeping seniors and other vulnerable populations safe through social distancing is absolutely vital as the coronavirus spreads. Following these and other methods of staying connected with elderly people can help them remain social and active and not fall prey to feelings of loneliness and social isolation.