



## Reducing Social Isolation

As we all make changes to our daily routines to help reduce infection rates of Covid-19 we are called upon to learn new technologies to perform our work to help prevent the spread of this disease.

Many of our seniors who rely on church fellowship, community based exercise classes, and meals at Senior Community Centers are being instructed to practice “social distancing.” Care facilities and retirement communities are restricting visitors, with some even restricting residents to their own rooms. This physical distancing is creating a new level of challenge for residents and their families. The family member who no longer can physically see their children is stressed. Family members are concerned and stressed because they can’t see their loved one. As a yoga teacher my job is to help people reduce stress not create more so I’ve been thinking of ways to keep our seniors connected to the community and especially to family.

So how can we help keep the social connection between families and their loved ones who may be feeling isolated? How practical is it to use new internet-based technologies when our care facilities are already short staffed?

Both of my parents (age 87 and 94) and my mother-in-law (age 84) passed away in 2017 and 2018. I was tasked with sorting and disposing of their lifelong collections of things and along the way I found boxes full of letters. My mother and mother-in-law kept every letter and card sent to them by their grandchildren. My father had letters from his father written in the mid 1950’s (before I was born). I lived several hours drive away from my parents so I also wrote letters and sent cards. I found correspondence from me among their things that I had forgotten sending. As well as letters and cards I know that they cherished every phone call, always ending with “it’s so good to hear your voice” before telling me they loved me.

So, I have several suggestions of effective ways to keep in touch with our beloveds during this time of distancing, whether in their own home or in a care facility: 1) Pick up the phone and talk to them. You might set a regular time to call, especially if they are in a care facility; such planning ahead will make it easier for care staff if your family member requires assistance with the phone; 2) Send a card, letter, photographs, news or magazine clippings, even a postcard. My friend’s mother keeps cards, photos and notes going back several years right next to her chair at her nursing home; 3) If your loved one has access to the internet safely and is welcome to trying new skills (cell phone, tablet, or pc with internet) you can help them set up video calls or social media, giving them guidance over the phone (there are many options on pc, Android, and Mac for video conferencing). Remember that for many in this particular age group the written word was one of two ways of communicating most familiar to them. Residential telephone service was rationed during World War II so that materials and labor could focus on producing war related products, and even long distance service was rationed for the war effort. According to quora.com it was not until 1960 that more Americans had telephones than indoor plumbing.

We don't know how long we will have to practice physical distancing but there are simple and inexpensive steps we can take to reduce social isolation. The most important thing is to keep positive, utilize the tools we have, and try not to complicate things too much. We can still keep our families connected without unnecessarily exposing anyone to Covid-19.

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