



Staying Connected

3/31/2020

We're so glad you're back! We hope you and your family continue to stay safe and healthy. As we continue to work with families during this time of quarantine and social distancing, one of the common themes that continues to come up is growing feelings of isolation. As families continue to follow the COVID-19 guidelines, face-to-face interactions with others outside the home are limited, kids are not able to spend time with friends in the same ways, and many people are feeling socially isolated.

We're in a weird time right now. It's important for us to keep physical distance from others in order to protect our own and others' health. But human beings are social creatures and we need connections with others in order to maintain mental, emotional, and physical health. So, in a time when we are not supposed to be around other people, how do we make sure we're socially connected?

Fortunately, there are a lot of ways to do that. We can FaceTime or video chat with family members, particularly older family members who are at greatest health risk. A number of the places we usually gather are offering online services. For instance, if you attend religious services, your place of worship may be offering online services and other virtual opportunities for fellowship among members. If you belong to any groups or organizations, they may be holding virtual events. Local moms' groups are a great place to connect with other moms who are going through the same struggles you are right now (e.g., How do I stay sane with my kids at home all the time and still juggle all my other roles?!!!)

Platforms like Meetup are changing their rules to allow for online events, so that could be a way to connect with people who share your interests. Not to add more to your already full plate, but online courses are available from a variety of platforms (many of them are free). Now might be a good time to take a course or a webinar, particularly if it allows for interaction with the other students.

Volunteering is a great way to feel connected to the world at large or to a specific community, even if you aren't volunteering in person. An internet search for "virtual or online volunteering opportunities" gives a host of potential options. Organizations are often seeking volunteers to help create and edit content, send letters, or make phone calls. Many organizations do not require a long-term time commitment, and many tasks can be completed on your own schedule. You can also look for things you and your family, or you and a few friends, can volunteer to work on together (well, virtually together). Giving back to a community increases the connection you feel with other people and reminds you of how even small things have a positive impact on others. It's even more important to have those types of reminders now.

What about social media? Social media can be a helpful way to connect to others during this time, *if you use it wisely*. Now is not the time to follow people who are posting things that make you feel anxious or stressed. Instead, look for content you find uplifting or calming. It's also a good idea to limit the amount of time you spend passively taking in information on social media (e.g., scrolling or randomly reading posts). Instead, use social media to connect with people you know or to participate in discussions in the communities you have joined or that you follow.



Now is a fantastic time to reconnect with friends who you may not speak to as often as you'd like. Social support is critical for mothers in the best of times; it's even more important now. If you have a group of friends, you can set up a virtual happy hour. Or, just call a good friend and talk for a bit. Even a short conversation can uplift your mood and reaffirms your connection to someone important in your life.



It's important for your kids to have a social outlet, too. They need to stay connected with their peers and it's not realistic that they depend on you for all their social interaction (or entertainment). Usually, we want to limit screen time for kids of all ages. However, right now kids do not have a lot of options for seeing their friends. So, relaxing some of the rules about screen time would be helpful. This does not mean a video game free-for-all. Allow your older kids to call or video chat with their friends. They may spend longer amounts of time on the phone because there is not another way for them to have social interaction. For younger kids, you can set up a virtual "play date" with their friends from the neighborhood or from school. Some kids are involved in activities that allow for video participation (e.g., martial arts, dance, robotics/coding club) while they are unable to attend in person. While your kids are involved in their activities, you can be involved in your own.

At this point, you might be wondering why I haven't talked about the most obvious social connections – the ones you have with your family members who live in your home. Well, yes, those connections are important. It's important to make sure that you and your spouse/partner are not just surviving and are making time (even just a little bit of time) to actually talk to one another and enjoy one another's company. The same goes for time with your kids. But, after being at home together for such an extended amount of time, you may actually need a break from each other. And that's okay.

So, it's important that you keep the social connections strong at home. However, making and maintaining connections outside your home are especially important when it feels like your world has become small and you feel socially isolated. Consider it an essential part of your own self-care. □

Again, we hope you that you and your family are staying healthy and safe. Keep supporting one another and connect with your loved ones. See you next week!

As a reminder, we have an amazing handout for families with information about COVID-19 that you may find helpful when speaking with your kids. [Click here to take a look.](#)