

## Social Connectedness in the Time of COVID-19

With most of the country on shelter-in-place orders, we are lacking many of our traditional ways of connecting with the seniors in our lives. Without meals, trips to the movies, hugs – what can we do to stay close to those we love? Complicating the matter further is how to maintain connectedness if your relative has trouble with complicated apps and devices like Zoom, Facetime, and iPads. Below, find ideas to stay in touch with no- to low- to higher-tech (but still friendly) options.

### **No-Tech**

*Snail mail.* Who doesn't get excited by personalized mail? A hand-written note or card can offer your loved one a bright spot to their day and a tangible memento to hold onto. Consider having everyone in your household write a special note, or setting up a rotation of mail from each member of the family. Try sending along photographs, particularly if your loved one has a memory impairment and may have a harder time remembering important family members.

*Window hellos.* While you may not want to step into your loved one's house and risk exposing them, consider driving by and waving hello. Play with your kids in your parents' yard so they can interact with their grandchildren from a distance. If your loved one is in a care community, try to arrange with staff a meet-up through the window.

*Collaborative projects.* What activities do you and your loved one enjoy doing together? Brainstorm ways to keep these activities alive, though they may look different. Drop by and plant a flower. Let them plant the next one, and bit-by-bit grow your garden together. Go for a socially-distanced walk. Prepare the main course, have them prepare the sides, and arrange a swap of items so you enjoy the same homecooked meal together. Give each other a call and narrate your chess moves to one another so you are both playing on the same board.

*Delivering treats.* Consider what, under normal circumstances, gives your loved one joy and quality of life. If they love a certain cuisine, arrange for a surprise take-out meal to be delivered to their door. If they miss their weekly game nights with friends, send them a deck of cards, a jigsaw puzzle, or a book of crosswords.

*Nurture spirituality.* Without being able to attend normal services, you and your family may be struggling from a lack of spiritual community just when it could be the most help. Collaborate on a schedule of faith activities, so even if you are not together to practice, you feel a sense of community knowing that your loved one is doing the same thing. Consider prayer over the phone or practicing your choir harmonies on a joint call. For those with internet access, explore if your religious center or another faith organization is hosting virtual services that you can attend.

### **Low-Tech**

*Jitter Bug.* GreatCall offers the [Jitterbug Flip](#) which allows for texting and calling on a phone with specialized big buttons. Additional packages offer emergency alert services, access to healthcare providers, and games. Their [Jitterbug Smart2](#) is a specialized smart phone that allows for text, phone, email, photos, and maps in a more accessible format. They are shipped charged and can connect to Wi-Fi or, for an additional cost, can come with a hotspot.

*OneClick.chat.* Many of us are likely familiar with Zoom, Facetime, Skype – key platforms to videochat with one another. [OneClick.chat](#) aims to make video-calling easier by requiring just “OneClick” to enter a meeting room. Users establish a consistent personalized meeting room name (<https://oneclick.chat/yourname>) that they can invite others to join. Though your loved one will not need to download a separate application, they will need internet access and Chrome, Firefox, or Safari as a browser.

*Joy for All.* If your loved one is an animal-lover, they may appreciate the company offered by one of [Joy for All](#)'s animatronic cats or dogs which move, purr, meow, and bark. Animals require 4 C batteries to operate which are included. An “on” switch must be flipped on the animal’s underbelly. If this would be a challenge for your loved one to set up, consider ordering one to your home, turning it on, and dropping it off at their home.

*Reminder Rosie.* [Reminder Rosie](#) is a device that reminds your loved one of important health-related activities like taking medications or drinking water. Family can program customized messages using their own voices, though the device operates entirely on prerecorded messages and cannot be used for live socialization. Plug in in an area where it will easily be heard. 3 AAA batteries can be installed as a back-up power source. Setting up reminders can be done through voice activation and/or manually with buttons on the device. Set-up is a multi-step process, so it may be helpful to program Reminder Rosie on a loved one’s behalf if they would have challenges doing so themselves.

*Care.coach.* [Care.coach](#) is a tablet that offers a personalized dog or cat avatar that responds to and checks in with seniors. Behind the avatar is a real person who converses with the user, reminds them of tasks like taking medications, and is trained to get in touch with emergency contacts as needed. Care.coach requires a monthly subscription. Set-up requires plugging in the device and allowing it to charge.

### **Higher-Tech**

*GrandCare.* [GrandCare](#) is a tablet specifically designed to be senior-friendly. GrandCare provides a secure platform over which users can text, message, and video call. Users can also play games, surf the internet, store photos, and set up a calendar. Users can also order additional home monitoring devices which will report back on a senior’s health activities. Set up of the basic tablet requires unboxing, plugging it in, turning it on, and connecting to Wi-Fi. Those without Wi-Fi can order a device with a 4G hot spot for an additional charge.

*Claris Companion.* [Claris Companion](#) also offers a senior-friendly tablet that can be used to text, message, and video call with just one click. Users can also host photos and videos, browse the web, and manage a calendar. The device can also be programmed to prompt a senior to take their medications. Users can plug it in straight out of the box.

*Pria.* [Pria](#) is a medication dispenser with a social element. The device can prompt seniors to engage in preprogrammed health-related activities, and offers a platform through which family can video call. Battery is included and internet connection is required.

Questions about piecing together a plan? Reach out to a Senior Care Advisor at (855) 781.1303 ext. 2 or [adultbackupcare@care.com](mailto:adultbackupcare@care.com) for personalized guidance.

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