

The current need for physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 means that many people may become more isolated. Here are suggestions for how to encourage social connectedness while practicing physical distancing and following critically important CDC guidance regarding how to not spread the virus.

Studied Interventions to Address Social Connectedness and Loneliness¹

- ✔ Schedule contact with someone from one's social network (e.g. a family member, friend, or a volunteer), weekly – 5 minutes to 1 hour or more per interaction
- ✔ Spend time with an animal – 1 to 3 times per week, 30 to 90 minutes per session (may be difficult during social distancing/stay at home orders due to on-site volunteer availability; fostering may be a possibility)
- ✔ Engage in a 'skills course'; receive instruction, improve one's ability to have contact with others, enhance friendships, or to make new friends – Weekly, 2 to 4 hours per session
- ✔ Increase spontaneous resident-driven and purposeful interaction with plants and animals
- ✔ Reminiscence; participants share with a group their recollections on a topic or theme – 1 to 2 times per week, 1 to 1.5 hours
- ✔ Peer support groups; participants select areas of discussion related to their needs – Weekly, ¾ to 1.5 hrs.
- ✔ Public Broadcast; Listen to music or radio programs – Daily, 1 hour

Action Steps

- ✔ *Build on Existing Resources and Infrastructures- Don't reinvent the wheel!*
 - Can you pivot existing services; what in-person group can become phone/online? Volunteers may no longer be allowed on-site, is it possible to move some of their assistance virtual?
 - Leverage relationships and resources to expand technology access for your community.
- ✔ *Innovate*
 - Ask peer specialists and others with lived experience in supportive housing and in the community about what types of interaction helps the most. Recruit resident leaders and discuss new initiatives.
 - Is it possible to create virtual communities via social media or by phone?
- ✔ *Advocate to Diagnose, Deliver and Fund Care Related to Social Isolation²*
 - Adopt a clinical screening tool for social isolation and including it in electronic medical records;
 - Offer Medicare and/or Medicaid reimbursement for social support through waivers, Medicare Advantage, or innovation models funded by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI).

Innovative Social Inclusion Efforts: How can these senior focused strategies work in your community?

[Well-Connected](#) (877) 797-7299 Well Connected is a community made up of participants, staff, facilitators, presenters, and other volunteers who care about each other and who value being connected. All groups are accessible by phone at no cost to participants age 60 or over. Well Connected members call in via a toll-free number at a set time each week, with some groups also offering the option to connect via computer, tablet, or mobile device. Most groups last 30 minutes to an hour with around 12 participants. Also available in Spanish - [Bien Conectado](#) or by phone at (877) 400-5867.

[Lonely No More](#) The Lonely No More program consists of weekly Elder Circles, a teleconference call between isolated seniors, facilitated by trained community members (volunteers). Elder Circle allow seniors to develop social networks without having to face the weather or lack of transportation and empower community members to become peer advocates for isolated and at-risk seniors.

¹ O'Rourke, H. M., Collins, L., & Sidani, S. (2018). Interventions to address social connectedness and loneliness for older adults: a scoping review. *BMC geriatrics*, 18(1), 214. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-018-0897-x>

² The Power of Connection: Reversing Social Isolation in Rural America (2018). Connectivity Summit on Rural Aging. <http://www.tivityhealth.com/assets/Tivity-Social-Isolation-Report-FINAL-181119.pdf>

Technology to Mitigate Social Isolation: Leveraging what is at our fingertips

[Front Porch Center for Innovation and Wellbeing](#): This is a subsidiary of a large older adult and affordable housing provider that has several case studies utilizing technology to engage residents including a [Voice First pilot](#) utilizing Amazon Alexa, [Skype video chat](#) with facilitated questions and several initiatives related to [TeleHealth](#).

AARP's [Connect2Affect Connected Communities](#) provides voice-activated technology, bundled with a community management platform that empowers resident service coordinators to help residents live happier, healthier and more connected lives. The cost is \$25 annually per client plus the cost of the device and training for staff.

[Ageless Innovation](#) offers Joy For All pets which are robotic companion animals designed to reduce social isolation among individuals with memory care needs They run approximately \$110 per animal.

[Care.coach](#): Care.coach virtual coaches combine human intelligence and compassion with software automation and clinical algorithms to provide 24/7 psychosocial support for older adults. Researchers at universities and clinicians in diverse care settings have validated Care.coach's innovative approach in caregiving and its ability to reduce loneliness, improve perceived social support, and drive outcomes - including reducing the need for nursing visits to the home, preventing falls, and mitigating delirium among hospitalized elders.

[OneClick.Chat](#) is web-based video chat that does not require any software to download. It offers two products- Meeting Rooms which allow up to 12 participants at a time and Live Event Hosting which can host between 25 up to unlimited participants. Research funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) shaped the design of the products, making them easy for older adults to use. Costs for meeting room plans begin at \$15 per month and allow for unlimited meetings.

List of Organizations that Can Help

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)- (800) 662-HELP (4357); Online locator and hotline to help people find counseling services near where they live.

SAMHSA has also developed list of Virtual Recovery Resources:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/virtual-recovery-resources.pdf>

As well as a tip sheet on Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health during Social Distancing:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-social-distancing-quarantine-isolation-031620.pdf>

[Rural Aging Resource Center](#) is an online "HUB" to promote greater sharing of ideas, information, pilot programs and other ongoing efforts that could be shared with a broader public audience. This portal now exists as an educational platform meant to facilitate inter-organizational communication, encourage partnerships, and disseminate best practices on rural aging issues. The five issues they focus on are: social isolation, infrastructure, nutrition, healthcare and community.

[For Like Minds](#) is an online mental health support network that allows for individuals to connect with others who are living with or supporting someone with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and stressful life events. It is free to sign up and use.

[Made of Millions](#) is a global advocacy nonprofit with resources and experiences that reach over three million individuals each year. It provides a virtual online community forum that provides support and advocacy including a live stream and a comprehensive online directory of resources:

<https://www.madeofmillions.com/get-help>

[Black Mental Health Alliance](#)- Provides information and resources, and a "Find a Therapist" locator to connect with a culturally competent mental health professional.

[LGBT National Hotline](#)- (888) 843-4564 available Monday-Friday 1pm-9pm PT and Saturday 9am-2pm PT

[Boys Town National Hotline](#)- (800) 448-3000 is a 24-hour crisis line for teens and families in need of help: suicide prevention line, parents can call about parenting issues, kids can call about anything - provides referrals and problem-solving; also provides suicide prevention line, referrals, and problem solving (calls answered by trained crisis counselors). Spanish resources available on website; Spanish-language available on hotline.

[Trevor Lifeline](#)- (866) 488-7386; text line START to 678-678; 24/7 hotline, text-line, and online chat; Provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for LGBTQ youth ages 13-24, as well as free online educational modules. Spanish-language translation service available.

[Trans Lifeline](#)- (877) 565-8860 Crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for transgendered individuals (hotline is run by transgendered individuals). Also provides help for individuals wanting to change legal name on passport, license, ID, etc.

[ElderCare Locator Helpline](#)- (800) 677-1116 Public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging that offers a "Find Help in your Community" locator that connects individuals to services in the community for older adults and their families. Provides Spanish language translator service to callers.

[America's VetDogs](#)- (866) 838-3647 Provides service dogs (at no cost) to veterans, active-duty service members, or first responders who are living with disability caused by PTSD.

[Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) (ADAA)- (240) 485-1001; Info on anxiety & depression. Offers online support groups, in Spanish also. Includes a list of resources specific to coronavirus anxiety: <https://adaa.org/finding-help/coronavirus-anxiety-helpful-resources>

[Depression & Bipolar Support Alliance](#) (DBSA)- (800) 826-3632; Provides information on bipolar and depression; offers online support groups and forums.

[Borderline Personality Disorder Resource Center](#)- (888) 694-2273; Resources and information on BPD; including referrals to clinicians and treatment centers.

[U.S. Pain Foundation](#)- (800) 910-2462; Offers network of free, live support group calls weekly; Pain Connection Live are call-in support groups for those individuals living with chronic pain; <https://painconnection.org/support-groups/calls/>

[Emotions Anonymous](#)- (651) 647-9712; An international fellowship of people who desire to have a better sense of emotional well-being. EA members Skype, watch YouTube, call-in and participate in other virtual meetings for the purpose of working toward recovery from any sort of emotional difficulties. The EA is non-professional and can be a complement to therapy.

[SMART Recovery](#)- (440) 951-5357; A substance use self-help program using cognitive behavioral therapy approaches to recover from addictive behaviors. Provides free, peer-led online support groups for individuals and family members/allies of those living with addiction

Parent-Specific Resources

[The Balanced Mind Parent Network](#)- (800) 826-3632 A program of the DBSA, that guides families raising children with mood disorders to answers, and support through an online support community. Membership is \$5 per month.

Parent Helping Parents- <https://www.php.com/> E-Learning Library offers critical information on special needs topics in video or podcast format

Echo- <https://www.echotraining.org/> Educate trauma survivors (including parents and service professionals) about trauma and resilience in order to promote survivor empowerment, resolve individual and community-level trauma, and create the safe, stable, nurturing relationships that break the cycle of generational trauma. Currently offers online training for both providers and parents in trauma and resiliency.