



How to use technology to keep in touch with your loved ones

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Feeling isolated is a major concern while we're all staying at home during this time.



Being physically disconnected from your friends and loved ones while social distancing can take a mental and emotional toll.



But thanks to the internet and modern technology, it's easier than ever to stay connected from afar – even if you're unfamiliar with ways to communicate using technology.



Here, we'll explore options for virtual communication and discover how to use technology to keep in touch.

Technology to stay in touch

However you decide to go about it, staying in touch with friends and family, especially during a crisis, is so important. Since we can't meet in person, getting together online is a great substitute.

So, what technology is the best fit to keep your family connected and engaged during this time? Here's a list (in order of my favorite) of the most popular means of staying connected, along with some info about each. Let us know what works best for you!

Make video calls to your loved ones

While virtual meetings and video conferencing have been in the day-to-day realm of working professionals for many years now, the expansion of video meetings into the purely social realm during COVID has been unprecedented. Video calling has become easier, cheaper, more reliable, and more capable so that it is now within the reach of everyone

Engage in group chats

Not everyone can attend a video call in real-time. That's why sometimes communicating over messages can be easier. In addition to normal text messaging, apps such as Facebook Messenger, Snapchat, and WhatsApp make it quick and easy to chat with your friends and family groups all in one place without needing to set up a time for a live conference call. You can send photos, videos, and audio clips to your entire group all at once that they can look at whenever they want. So, set up a group chat with your friends and family, and stay connected.

Follow a simple live online workout class

The World Health Organization's guide to "stay physically active during self-quarantine," bears mentioning. Attending a live exercise class like yoga or Pilates can be a great way of seeing and interacting with other people, not to mention staying moving and active in a time of limited mobility. There is a wide range of classes available online. Whether you're looking for something intense, or if you're just trying to get a simple stretch session in, there is likely a local gym running socially safe, virtual exercise classes.

Listen to the radio

You can still listen to the radio the old-fashioned way, on an actual radio. Nowadays however you can access radio stations, from across the country and across the world via a smart device. Smartphone applications like Spotify, TuneIn (Android), or myTuner (Apple) give you access to music, talk radio, sports all in real-time.

OR SIMPLY...

Write a letter

Receiving an unexpected card in the mail is pure joy — it's a lovely surprise to break up the usual habit of sifting through bills, junk mail and fliers. Sometimes a simple note that says you're thinking of someone can mean the world.

Social media

We all know people who aren't on Facebook yet, or who are but never look at it. Now is a good time for those folks to get over their aversion to social media and see it for what it is: one of the most comprehensive and engaging ways to stay connected to your friends, your family, and the world at large.

Sharing something on your Facebook page and then watching people comment and communicate with you is a great form of entertainment and a great source of information. Using Facebook is a great way to continue seeing the people you know doing the things you can't do with them right now. Facebook allows for the sharing of articles, selfies, videos, and other information that is both useful and informative.

THE NEW SOCIAL – SOCIAL MEDIA

A record number of seniors are now using social networking to stay connected with family and friends.

[Facebook](#) is far and away the most popular social media platform.

Odds are, you already have a Facebook account.

But if you don't, you may want to consider it, since it's possibly the most interactive and engaging way to keep in touch with people from around the world.

Viewing and sharing photos with loved ones, reconnecting with old friends and colleagues, and updating the people in your life are just the start of what you can do on social media.

Some families create a private Facebook group so share pictures and stay in touch.

Private groups allow you to connect with the people you want without posting anything public to all your Facebook friends.

Beyond staying connected, Facebook and other social media platforms provide a fun way to engage your current interests and discover new ones.

There are millions of activities, recipes, entertainment and inspiration to explore on Facebook alone.

Other social media platforms include the photo-centric [Instagram](#), the text-based [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#) for those who like to keep up with professional ties. Social media is certainly not just for younger generations anymore.

SMART PHONES FOR SMART SOCIALIZING

Odds are, you or your loved one has a mobile smartphone such as an iPhone or a similar device.

Today's smartphones are incredibly intuitive and easy to use.

They even have features like voice recognition, allowing you to operate your phone, make calls and send text messages just by talking.

And while you can converse with your loved ones through good old-fashioned phone calls, there are many other ways to use your smartphone to communicate.

Text messaging has more features than ever, like recording audio messages and using emojis and images to communicate.

There are also a variety of instant messaging applications available like WhatsApp, Google Hangouts, and more that provide the same texting capabilities and can be linked to your email account.



Cell phones aren't the only smart devices you can use to keep in touch with loved ones.

Other devices, including tablets, like an iPad, and even smart watches like the Apple Watch are great ways to instantly communicate.

With smart watches, calling or texting is always at your fingertips, or rather, your wrist.

The main benefit of tablets is the larger screen size, making it ideal for the next best thing to physically socializing – video chatting.

VIDEO CHAT MAKES STAYING CONNECTED EASY

Video chatting has revolutionized the way we communicate.

Available on almost any smartphone, tablet, laptop or computer, video chatting apps make face-to-face connection simple.

The best video chat app for seniors really depends on individual preferences and what kind of device you're using.

[Zoom](#) and [Skype](#) are two of the most popular video chat apps used today and are among the easiest to use.

By far the most common method of video chatting today is FaceTime.

Usually accessed on a smartphone, using FaceTime is just like making a regular phone call, only enabling your phone's camera to allow you to see the person on the other end of the line and vice versa.

FaceTime and video chat capabilities come standard on all modern smartphones, avoiding the need to download another app.



Video chat is one of the best ways to communicate using technology.

You can make memories with others from miles away instead of missing out on them.

Plus, there are many [virtual games](#) apps, such as [House Party](#) and [Jackbox](#), which you can play over video chat.

However you choose to do it, video chatting is truly the next best thing to genuine physical connection.

FaceTime

FaceTime is an app for one-on-one and group video calling. It's so easy to use and it's very popular with iPhone users. Unfortunately, it's only available on Apple devices. So, it's fairly limited.

Zoom

Zoom is designed for business meetings, but many people are using it as a way to communicate with friends.

On the free plan you can hold meetings for up to 100 people and have unlimited one-on-one calls, too. There *is* a time limit of 40 minutes on group calls, but you can start a second call immediately and it's only a slight interruption.

Facebook Messenger

If most of your family and friends use Facebook, [Facebook Messenger](#) is a good way to stay in touch. It lets you easily exchange text messages, pictures, video, audio and other files, and also allows for voice and video calling with up to six participants.

If you're a big family, a [Facebook Group](#) might be the way to go. Make sure it's set to private, and then invite everyone via Facebook. You can post anything to the group, including live video. New members can be added at any time, and will see the whole of the chat history when they're added.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp uses your phone's cellular or Wi-Fi connection to facilitate messaging and voice calling to nearly anyone on the planet, alone or in a group with up to four participants, and is especially nice for families and small collaborative groups. The app lets you make calls, and send and receive messages, documents, photos, and videos.

To get started, all you have to do is download the free app to your phone and follow the instructions. Start a group and invite your friends and family using their phone numbers, or make a poster featuring an invite link to stick up in your apartment building or neighborhood.

Google Hangouts

If you already have a [Google](#) or [Gmail](#) account, you'll find [Google Hangouts](#) very easy to use. Don't worry if you don't, though, as signing up for a Google account takes only a few minutes and is completely free.

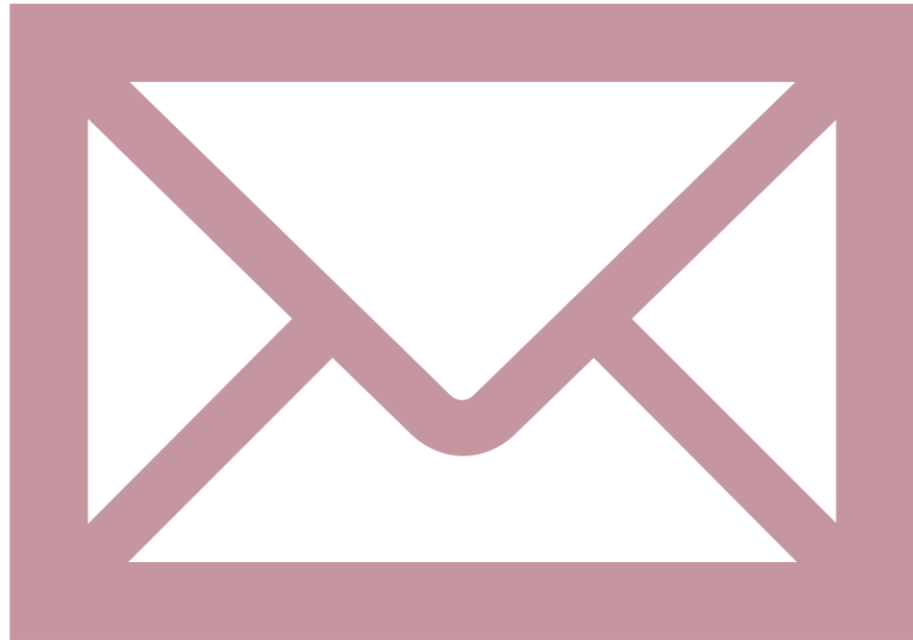
Hangouts is also free to use, as long as the person you're trying to reach also has Hangouts. [Simply send an invitation to chat](#) by email, or link your phone to make calls. You can also start long-running conversations with individuals or groups, allowing you to share pictures and send text messages.

If you like Google Hangouts, Google has several other products that might be useful for staying in touch. [Google Photos](#), for example, backs up all your pictures online and lets you share them, while [Google Drive](#) lets you share files.

Skype

Skype is the go-to service when it comes to video calls. It's free to call anyone as long as they also have Skype; you only need to pay a fee if you want to make a voice call directly to a landline or mobile phone.

Some people find Skype complicated to use. This is because different users have different types of account. Some will have a Skype name, some a number, and some a Microsoft account. This can make finding your friends and family on Skype somewhat tricky.



USE EMAIL TO CHECK IN ON LOVED ONES

While sending an email to a loved one might seem standard, it's still a quick way to keep tabs on family and friends.

And today, email is easier to use than ever before.

You can access your email from your smartphone or tablet and explore the myriad features that come with it.

A fun way to spread some joy to your loved ones is to start a weekly or monthly newsletter, updating the people in your life on what's been going on lately with you and your family, sharing interesting or humorous links you've come across on the internet, and sending pictures to friends or family members who live far away.

The best thing about email is that today it's practically a universal form of digital communication.

Spotify

It's a way to listen to music and discover new artists, but now it's also a unique way of staying in touch with friends. Making playlists and listening to ones friends have made. For those friends who have asked, I made playlists with songs that reminded me of them and with songs I knew they liked. It's an awesome way to strengthen friendships and stay in touch with people far away.

Trivia Crack

On the subject of staying connected with people, you can connect your Facebook to Trivia Crack and play your friends. A little friendly competition while also growing in knowledge is a wonderful way to pass time while stuck at home.

Instagram

Another form of social media I've had fun with recently is Instagram. All over the internet are fun brackets you can post on your story to let your followers vote on. I have seen everything from the best Taylor Swift song to the best Marvel movie.

House party

If you've had the app, you know just how much fun it is. You can add your friends and it notifies you whenever they're on. If you're free as well and in the mood to talk, then simply go on the app and start up a video call. You can do it with just one person or with multiple. **Bonus: it even has games you can play in group chats.**

Game Pigeon

If you have it on your phone then you know how addictive it is. It's an app on your phone that allows you to play archery and 8-ball with friends from all over. It's been another exciting way to keep in touch with friends hundreds of miles away.

A Book Club

Start a virtual book club, plan on reading a few chapters of a certain book each day. Each Sunday afternoon, we have a group call to discuss what we read. You can find **PDF copies of some books online**, allowing the group to have easy and free access.

A Phone Call

If your family is anything like mine, then a phone call is the preferred method of contact. And lucky for you, it's one of the simplest ways to stay in touch! One-on-one chats are great for easing anxiety and building relationships, and they're the social distancing equivalent of going out for a cup of coffee and a catch-up.

ALL ABOUT CONNECTION

Staying connected with loved ones using technology is a tremendous way to stay emotionally well.

We're discovering new ways to keep people socially engaged while we practice social distancing.

The internet ensures you're always able to stay virtually connected with the people in your life.

If you're intimidated by virtual communication, our friendly team members can teach you how to use technology to keep in touch.

During this time, we want you to know that we're here to support you.

Start Today

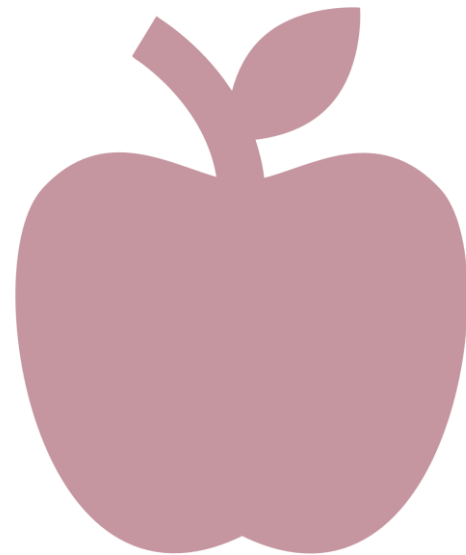
There are so many different ways to connect with our loved ones, all from the comfort of our own home. Pick up the phone (or iPad, tablet, laptop, pen, pencil, markers...!) today and reach out to the people who matter most to you.

**Be Safe, Be Cautious,
But Be Connected**



Apple Watch

One fun way to stay fit with faraway friends is through an Apple Watch. If you have one, you are able to share your fitness tracking with friends. Through that, you can **see who is doing what exercise**. Seeing friends meet their daily goals is a cool way to keep motivation up to stay active longer.



Amazon's Echo Show

Amazon's Echo device plays music, tells you the weather and even [reads you The Times](#). But Amazon's [Echo Show](#) offers more than that.

With its built-in camera and screen, the Echo Show can provide a simple way to have virtual face-to-face chats with loved ones.

Each party can use an Echo Show to video chat, but the Echo Show can also chat with any smartphone that has the Alexa app installed.

To set up the device, download the Amazon Alexa app to your smartphone and follow the setup instructions. During this process, you will be able to import your contacts. (You can also enter contacts manually.) Amazon also offers [instructions](#) to help set up other people's devices remotely in case the person receiving the Show doesn't have a smartphone.

Once that's complete, you can simply say, "Alexa, call Mom," and your Echo Show will ring up the Show in Mom's house.

If you want something a little more spontaneous, you can use the Drop-In feature, which starts a video call without the other person having to actually answer it. (That feature can be a bit startling, like having someone pop up in your kitchen window, and can be turned off in the Alexa app's settings.)

If you're ordering an Echo Show device for someone, ask Amazon to mark it as a gift so it doesn't get tied to your Amazon account.

Echo Shows come in three screen sizes and three price points. Regardless of size, the device — like the Echo — plays music, shares the weather forecasts and a million other interesting or [inane things](#).

Facebook Portal

Everyone you know has Facebook, so this may be one of the simplest ways to stay connected.

Portals, which come in three sizes — the [original 10-inch Portal](#), the [8-inch Mini](#) and the [massive 15-and-a-half-inch Portal Plus](#) — are like Echo Shows, except they connect through Facebook. Instead of importing your smartphone contacts, they rely on your Facebook account's friends list, and instead of connecting through Alexa calls, the Portal uses Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook.

Like the Echo Show, each home will need a device. One clever feature of a Portal: Its camera tracks your face, so if you move around the room while chatting, it should keep you in the center of the screen's display. If you want to get cute with it, you can even add filters — like animal ears, for example — to your video. The Portal is especially good for families with children.

When you're not using it for video calls, the Portal will display your Facebook or Instagram photos, which is another way to keep in touch.

And because Facebook is everywhere — an app on your phone and a website in your browser — you can also use both of those platforms to make video calls to a Portal.

Google Nest Hub Max

If you already use Google Assistant (or Google Home, as the company's original speaker was called) and want to stick with a platform you know, the [Google Nest Hub Max](#) might be the smart display device for you. (But opt for the Max — the smaller and cheaper Nest Hub doesn't have a camera, so you can't video chat.)

Video calls are easiest from one Nest Hub Max to another, although the gadget can make video calls to smartphones using Google's [Duo service](#). That method can be a little tricky, but calls to other Hubs should provide good sound and video quality. Like the Facebook Portals, Next Hub Max includes a face-tracking feature to keep you in the center of the image.

Jitsi Meet

Zoom and WebEx have become the de facto video chat apps during the pandemic, but [Jitsi Meet](#) can offer easy video chats without the bells and whistles.

[Jitsi Meet](#) is free, simple, works in most browsers and has apps for [Android](#) and [iOS](#). It doesn't require an account, can deliver smooth video and audio, and includes extras like in-chat YouTube playback, which allows everyone to watch the same YouTube video at the same time.

On [meet.jit.si](#) using your computer or the mobile app, you can start a meeting using a randomly generated room name. Or you can override this word salad with an easier-to-remember name of your own choosing, but unless you want to end up in a chat with a bunch of strangers, it's best to avoid names that are too short or too simple. (Try using the first sentence of your favorite novel, or a lyric from a song you love.)

To invite friends to your chat, copy the URL from your browser address bar and send it in an email or text message. The mobile app also lets you share invite links through apps installed on your phone, like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp or Telegram.

One caveat to using Jitsi Meet: Its desktop version works best in the Chrome browser and a few others. ([Here's a longer list](#).) Jitsi Meet will still work in Safari and Firefox, but it may be a little glitchy or missing certain features.
