



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY
CHILDREN

We Care About Each Other! Connectedness

Feeling like a valued part of a family is important in growing resilience in young children. Encouraging our children to care for others and “rally together” when hard times occur helps them to feel as though they are a part of something bigger than themselves. Our children need to feel appreciated and needed in their own families. As we continue to practice social distancing, our children may feel as though they have lost control of connecting with those they love. It is important to help our young children stay connected to those they care about. Staying connected while social distancing can be tough, but we can help our children find ways to keep up important connections.

Making Connections

There are many benefits to making connections and encouraging those we care about. Some benefits include increased happiness and better health overall. Young children like to be close to others they know, especially family members, friends, teachers, and other community members. The idea of keeping their distance from others can be strange for them and one that can cause stress. Encouraging our children to show kindness to others in a safe way helps them to keep important relationships in their lives.

Deliver Some Love Activities

Research has shown that hugging offers multiple health benefits while also reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation. Hugs can also foster connectedness but during this time we may need to find other ways to connect with our loved ones. To help your child maintain important connections, encourage them to create a unique gift. The gift can be mailed, emailed, or delivered with no contact.

- **Paint hands and feet:** Encourage your child to use paint to make prints of their hands and feet — if you don’t have paint, try making some [homemade](#) paint.
- **Mail a hug:** Consider tracing your child on a large piece of paper to send to those they love. They may even literally “[mail a hug](#).”
- **A special time:** Your child can draw a picture of a favorite time spent with a loved one. Encourage them to include either a word or symbol of encouragement.
- **Make your own:** Invite your child to connect remotely as a way to show someone they care. You may even wish to [make your own envelope](#) or [order postage stamps online](#).
- **Dictate a message:** You may also support your child by having them dictate a special message to include with the gift.

To learn more about the science behind the importance of writing to encourage connectedness and family bonding, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Bonding from Afar: The Effects of a Writing Micro-intervention on Perceived ChildParent Connectedness and Personal Well-being](#)
- [The Role of Family Cohesion in Children’s Process of Socialization](#)



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY
YOUTH

We Care About Each Other! Connectedness

For most teens, life is filled with fun activities and time with friends. Activities like these are an important part of a young person's life, which makes social distancing especially tough. Lost connections with peers are painful and can lead to a sense of loss and sadness. It's important for us to recognize the emotions this new reality may bring. We can help foster resilience in our teens by helping them to deal with their difficult emotions by showing compassion and encouragement.

Making Connections

Sometimes our teens may need to take a break from a stressful situation, but at the same time may need a sense of connectedness to peers. Strong connections with family, peers, teachers, and other community members are important in the social and emotional health of youth.

Connecting Through a Fit Challenge Activity

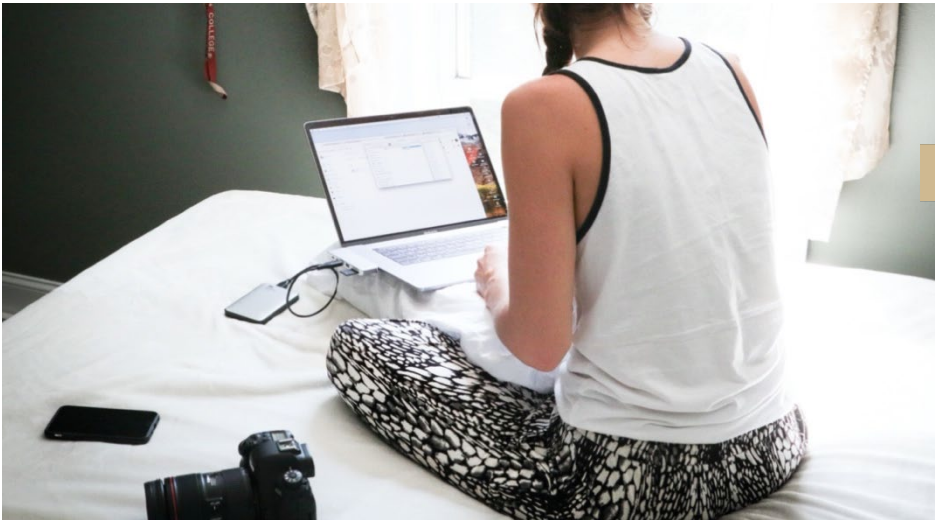
Exercise can help young people de-stress and offer a chance to encourage others. Your teen may wish to choose something they enjoy or to try something new found online. Virtual challenges can add interaction to an activity that may not otherwise be social. A fit challenge not only helps build connections but keeps your teen's mind and body active!

- Single-day fitness challenges can connect teens with others for a short time. Encourage your teen to reach out to peers and organize a fit challenge such as a virtual 5K (walk, run, or roll!) or bike race. Participants can meet virtually at the end of the day to celebrate their successes!
- Long-term fitness challenges can take place over several days or weeks and offer a chance for teens to encourage others. These fitness challenges not only provide regular social interaction, but help to keep them excited. Your teen may wish to encourage peers to join them in a long-term challenge, or they may wish to use a fitness app to connect with others.
- Fitness skill challenges can take place during a one-time virtual event. Teens may wish to challenge each other to focus on a single skill such as push-ups or planking. Encouragement during the challenge can be provided by family or others not participating.
- Many unique fitness challenges can be found online. Your teen may wish to join an online group for a workout challenge that lasts a single day or months. Opportunities for encouragement and relationship building are possible through this type of online challenge.

For in-person activities, refer to CDC guidelines regarding physical-distancing and limitations on in-person contacts: [CDC Personal and Social Activities Guidelines](#).

To learn more about the science behind the importance of creating connections, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Relationships First: Creating Connections that Help Young People Thrive](#)



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY

YOUNG ADULTS

We Care About Each Other! Connectedness

COVID-19 has left so many of us cut off from our social networks and supports. Even for those of us that are with immediate family members, the way we are connecting with our friends and extended family members may be very different than what it normally is. Relationships and human connections are important during these difficult times. There are ways we can be proactive about connecting with others so that, even in uncertain times, we can get the support we need.

Social Connections and Health

[Recent neuroscience research](#) actually suggests that humans are hard wired for social connection. Throughout history humans were more likely to survive if they lived in social groups and worked together to face obstacles and shared tasks. Being connected with other people who care about us remains a very important human need; a need as important as safety, food and shelter.

Strong social connections are linked to longevity, good health, recovery from disease, self-esteem and our sense of personal control. In addition, solid relationships with others appear to serve as a buffer against anxiety, depression and stress. Remember — it is not necessarily the number of friendships we have, but rather the quality of those connections. We should consider taking a “wise risk” and introduce ourselves to someone new.

Resources for Improved Connections and Social Interactions

Connectedness in the Face of Uncertainty

[The Human Skills We Need in an Unpredictable World](#), a TED talk by Margaret Heffernan, focuses on the skills needed to address uncertain times.

What is striking about this talk is Heffernan’s emphasis on the **importance of relationships and human connections in the face of all that is unknown**. She stresses that dealing with the unknown requires creativity and experimentation; the unknown cannot be addressed through a focus on efficiency. Focus more on the real situation we find ourselves in and adjust to changes, count on trusted others, and use our resourcefulness — to approach the challenges we may be facing.

Our current situations may be very different from those of others and we could not have predicted them. We cannot plan for the unknown—and cannot plan for the unknowns to come. But we can approach the future with a sense of imagination and steadiness in our ability to be connected and move forward together.

Video Resources

- [What Makes a Good Life? Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness](#)
- [5 Ways to Create Stronger Connections](#)

Internal Actions

- Take some time to think about what makes you feel connected and supported by others. Are there ways you can offer that same support to yourself?

External Actions

- Consider reaching out — via email, phone, video, or even in an old-fashioned letter to folks who are an important source of support for you. Even if it's just to say thanks or to tell them you're thinking about them, they'll likely appreciate it and feel less isolated. Use this connection time to use encouragement to support your friends, family and community to help them through the challenges ahead.



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY

OLDER ADULTS

We Care About Each Other! Connectedness

In times of social distancing, uncertainty, and loss, many of us, especially older adults, may be socially isolated or feeling lonely. Even those of us who are living with others can feel lonely during stressful times. The way we connect with each other matters. Connections that are meaningful and engaging can help us to feel less lonely, be more encouraging of each other, have a sense of purpose, think more clearly and improve our overall well-being

Growing Connections Across Generations

Relationships that span more than one generation are beneficial for both older adults and younger people. Helping older and younger people connect can help improve our sense of purpose, provide learning opportunities, and strengthen relationships. For example, older adults who may be away or separated from the younger people in their lives, can do many activities from a distance. These connections not only help give meaning to life, but can become another form of encouragement for family members.

Virtual Musical and Art Activities

Music and art can bring people together and add a sense of connection, even from afar. Music and art have been shown to have many positive effects on physical and mental health, particularly for older adults. Your family members can encourage each other as they play musical games or discover art together.

- **Music and art comparisons:** Encourage older adults and younger family members to discuss their favorite kinds of music. Compare music genres by together listening to a concert online. You may also wish to do a virtual art tour together. Many museums offer online tours.
- **Sharing songs and art:** Older adults in your family may enjoy sharing and teaching family members songs from their childhood. In response, younger members of your family can teach the older adults one of their favorite childhood songs. It may be fun to sing songs that have simple motions or dances so that your entire family can engage in their own way. You may also wish to share pictures of favorite kinds of art or crafts.
- **Name that tune or craft activity:** Encourage family members to hum the notes to a song while other family members try to guess the song. You may also wish play a game of 20 questions. Encourage a family member to ask questions as they try to guess the kind of craft activity you are thinking of.
- **Coloring together:** Older adults may enjoy coloring with younger members of your family. This can be done virtually as they discuss the activity together.

To learn more about the science behind the importance of family connections with older adults and the benefits of music, you may wish to read the below research:

- [Keep Your Brain Young with Music](#)
- [How Does Music Benefit the Health of Senior Citizens?](#)
- [Social isolation, loneliness in older people pose health risks](#)
- [Engage at Every Age: The benefits of intergenerational relationships](#)



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



We Care About Each Other! Connectedness

Even when family members are in the same space together on a daily basis, it can still feel hard to connect with each other. It can also be difficult to connect with family members and friends who don't live with us when we can't visit them or while socially distancing. Building and keeping positive connections with family and friends can be harder when we feel stressed and anxious.

Social connectedness is a very important protective factor for adults, children and families. It helps reduce stress, build relationships, improve our skills to get through, and can improve our physical and mental health. We need to feel loved, wanted, understood, and to receive positive attention from others. The good news is that the people we reach out to are also often eager for support and connection as well.

Internal Actions

Keeping supportive relationships and strong connections with others in your life during uncertain times can help you build resiliency. Here are some things you can do to build connections:

- **Check in with each family member individually.** Take a moment to ask your family member how their day has been. Ask how they are feeling or invite them to show you a picture or image that tells how they are feeling. It's easy to get distracted with life, but taking time to listen and be in the moment takes only a few minutes and will go a long way in building and keeping strong connections.
- **Show compassion and kindness.** Encouraging family members to share their negative emotions or worries without them being ignored or "made less of" can help reduce anxiety. If your family member sees your true concern and compassion for their well-being, they may worry less.

External Actions

Have a front porch or neighborhood yard sitting night. Consider organizing an event where friends or neighbors gather on porches, in the yard, in a park, or in a community space while social distancing. Encourage social distanced conversations to build a sense of connectedness and to help build relationships. Families, neighbors, and friends may enjoy making signs to cheer each other while safely talking with those they have not seen in a while. Refer to the CDC's guidelines on [daily activities and going out](#) for more information on how to be safe while out in your community.

For more information about porch sitting and its health and wellness benefits, you may wish to read:

- [Recovering the Lost Art of Porch Sitting](#)
- [Sitting on a Porch Can Be Good for Your Health](#)

Some of the material on this page was adapted from:

- [Influences of social connectedness on behaviour in young children: A longitudinal investigation using GUiNZ data research report](#)
- [Hugging – 7 Backed-by-Science Benefits](#)
- [Social Connections: Protective & Promotive Factors](#)



FAMILIES

TACKLING TOUGH TIMES

TOGETHER



College of Health and Human Sciences

Welcome to Families Tackling Tough Times Together!

We hope you find the enclosed ideas and suggestions helpful as you care for your family during the pandemic. We know the pandemic is a very big challenge. How families cope can affect both parents and children for a long time.

We are scientists, educators, and students from Purdue University, and we are here to help! For nine weeks this fall, we will provide weekly collections of ideas for families to use to build on their strengths.

These tools are free, flexible, and informed by science. They are designed for families of all types, with tailored suggestions for children, youth, young adults and older adults, and suitable for both civilian and military families. We hope that your family will try one activity each week!

Would you like to earn financial rewards?

We especially welcome families living in the continental US who are interested in trying out project materials and telling us about their experiences. These families can earn financial rewards by sharing about one hour of their time over the next two months. Sign up now at the link below!

https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3vK1BJq2EiUksAJ

For more information

- Join the Families Together Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HHSFamiliesTogether/>
- Visit the project website: <https://www.hhs.purdue.edu/families-together/>