



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY
CHILDREN

We Care About Each Other! Connectedness

Feeling like a valued part of a family is important in fostering resilience in young children. Encouraging children to care for others and “rally together” when adversity arises helps them to feel as though they are a part of something bigger than themselves. It is important for children to feel appreciated and needed in a family. During this time of social distancing, children may feel as though they have lost control of connecting with those they love. It is important to help young children stay connected to those in their own households as well as those they are unable to visit.

This week’s activities focus on making connections and showing others we care.

Deliver Some Love

To help maintain connections with loved ones, encourage young children to create and mail, email, or set up no contact delivery of a unique gift!

Activities

- Use paint to make prints of hands and feet — if you don’t have access to paint, try some [homemade](#) paint
- Encourage children to connect remotely as they “[mail a hug](#)” to someone they care about
- Invite older children to draw a picture of a favorite time spent with their loved one

Materials

- Paper (printer paper, butcher paper, or newspaper taped together)
- Paint
- Coloring supplies (crayons, markers, colored pencils, etc.)
- Envelopes ([learn how to make your own](#))
- Postage ([order stamps online](#)), you can also take a picture and send digitally or set up a no-contact delivery to a loved one

The Rainbow Fish

The Rainbow Fish is a heartwarming children’s book by Marcus Pfister. The book teaches children about the importance of doing for others and making connections. Young children love the shiny scales of the rainbow fish and can relate to the importance of sharing the things that make them special.

Activities

- Read *The Rainbow Fish* together! If you don’t have a copy of your own, view an [online version](#) read by the actor Ernest Borgnine.

Encourage your child to think of something that makes him/her/them special. Some examples might include a love of stringing beads or singing favorite songs. Invite your child to show they care by sharing what they love with others. You may wish to hold a family talent show or encourage your child to show how much they care by making special gifts.



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY
YOUTH

We Care About Each Other! Connectedness

For most young people, life is filled with extracurricular 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 grief. It's important for family members to validate the emotions this new reality may bring. Family members can help foster resilience in young people by helping them to deal with their difficult emotions. It is important that we do not downplay the sense of loss and grief that young people may be feeling. Instead, we can show compassion and provide tools to help them cope with their feelings. This week we will focus on making connections through validation and caring.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Validate their feelings, even if their feelings are being disappointed, bored, angry or sad. When we validate others we let them know that we understand and accept their thoughts and feelings. Validating the thoughts and feelings of those we love can help them to feel accepted and valued.
2. It can be helpful to make a coping skills plan for when emotions and feelings are overwhelming. The time to work on creating a plan is when feeling calm and relaxed. Adults and youth can work together to identify which coping skills will work the best for them. If young people can identify when they are starting to get upset or emotional, they can identify early warning signs to watch for in the future. Then adults can help them to identify the coping skills that will support them when needed, such as asking to play a game or go for a walk. Helpful coping kits rely on materials that are easily accessible even when youth are feeling overwhelmed.

Sometimes young people just need to take a break from a stressful situation, but at the same time they need a sense of connectedness to peers. Here are some ideas of ways to take a break while still staying connected:

Connecting with a Fit Challenge

- Youth may enjoy connecting with peers, coaches or teachers by doing a fit challenge. Exercise can help young people de-stress. They may wish to choose something they enjoy or try something new such as the #ChloeTingChallenge.

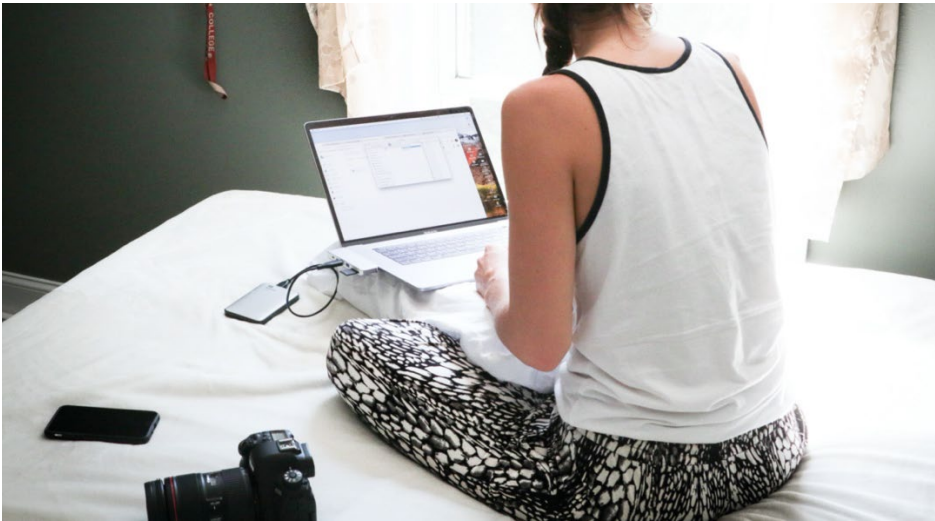
Evoke Opposite Emotions

- If a young person is really angry, have them watch a funny movie or TikTok. If they are feeling sad, watch a scary movie with friends virtually through FaceTime or a watch party. The idea is to try and bring up an emotion that is different than the one they are stuck in while connecting to their peers for support.

Virtual Guests

- There are many ways to connect virtually with others, and spending time with friends can help relieve stress and anxiety. Try something other than just chatting virtually, like hanging out and having a "virtual pizza night" with friends!

Material adapted from [4 Ways to Help Children Manage Emotions During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#) and [Center for the Study of Social Policy Brief, Youth Thrive: Social Connections](#)



FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY
YOUNG ADULTS

We Care About Each Other! Connectedness

There have been many refrains since social distancing and stay-at-home orders were put in place but one that has stood out is that “we are all in this together” (United Nations). Of course it’s true — viruses are spread through contact, so stopping the spread requires that we all work together to minimize in-person contact; but it’s also ironic because COVID-19 has left so many people cut off from our social networks and supports. Even for those of you that are with immediate family members, the way you are connecting with your friends and extended family members may be very different than what it normally is. What is particularly difficult about that is how important relationships and human connections are in the face of all that is unknown.

But there are ways that we can be proactive about connecting with others so that, even in these uncertain times, we can get the support that we need.

Social Connections and Health

Recent neuroscience research actually suggests that humans are hard wired for social connection. In an evolutionary sense, humans were more likely to survive if they lived in social groups and worked together to face obstacles and share tasks. Being connected with other people remains a critical current human need; a need as important as safety, food, and shelter.

Strong social connections are associated with longevity, immune functioning, recovery from disease, self-esteem, and our sense of personal control. In addition, solid interpersonal relationships 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. Take a “wise risk” this week and introduce yourself to someone new.

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 unpredictability.

What strikes me most about this talk is Heffernan’s emphasis on the **importance of relationships and human connections in the face of all that is unknown**. She emphasizes that coping with the unknown requires creativity and experimentation; the unknown cannot be addressed through a focus on efficiency. It may sound quite counterintuitive, but I also want to encourage you to focus less on trying to recreate the “efficiency” we were all so focused on before COVID-19. Focus more on the real situation you find yourself in and modify variables, count on trusted others, and use your resourcefulness — to approach the academic, psychological and social challenges you are facing in the present.

All of our current situations are vastly different from one another and we could not have predicted them. We could not have planned for this 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 own support to yourself?

External Actions

- Now is a great time to reach 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.



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 engaged can help us:

- Feel less lonely
- Support each other
- Have a sense of purpose
- Improve our mood, cognition, and overall well-being

This week, we focus on how meaningful connections can be made with older adults in families – whether initiated by older adults themselves or others looking to connect with them.

Fostering Intergenerational Connections

Intergenerational relationships are beneficial for both older adults and younger people. Helping older and younger people connect can help older adults feel less isolated, provide learning opportunities for both, and strengthen relationships. For example, older adults who are isolated from the younger children in their life, can do a variety of activities with them from a distance, such as:

- Helping with homework virtually
- Reading or telling a story over the phone or through a virtual platform
- Playing games or doing puzzles online
- Telling children stories about the older adult's childhood
- Coloring something “together” and comparing the end products
- Making a simple craft “together”

Musical Activities

Music can bring people together and add a sense of connection, even from afar. Music has been shown to have many positive effects on physical and mental health, particularly for older adults. Not only is music great exercise for the brain but it can also lower stress and improve one's mood. Here are other musical activities that can be done during phone calls or video-chats to bring the family together:

- Listening to new music. What are younger members of the family listening to? Ask them and then expand your playlist while having a video chat together or while listening to an online concert. Check out the daily concerts from [Live Nation](#).
- Learn to sing or play a new song. Connect with family members or friends to learn it together.
- Listen to music that brings back a pleasant memory and share that memory with friends and family.

- Teach family members a new song. For example, grandparents can teach their grandchildren a song they loved as a child, and vice versa. Find songs that have simple motions or dances to them so that everyone can engage in their own way. Young children in particular may enjoy singing or playing an instrument with or for older adults.
- Play “Name that tune.” Hum the notes to a song while others try to guess.
- Start a game of song charades.
 - Write the names of songs that other members will know on separate pieces of paper.
 - Put the songs in a box.
 - Pick a piece of paper from the box and act out the song selected. [Here is a list of the top 100 musical works of the 20th century to get conversations started!](#)

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Even when family members are in the same space together daily, it can still feel challenging to connect with each other and with extended families, friends, and the community. Building and maintaining positive family connections can be harder when we feel stressed and anxious, but the good news is that the people we reach out to are often eager for support and reassurance.

Social connectedness is a very important protective factor for adults, children and families. It helps reduce family stress, improve coping, and even improves physical and mental health. Everyone wants to feel loved, wanted, understood, and to receive positive attention from others, especially people they consider to be family members.

Here are some ways to maintain strong connections with others during uncertain times:

- **Check in with each family member individually.** Take a quiet moment to ask how their day has been. Ask how they are feeling or have them show you a picture or image of how they are feeling. It is easy to get distracted with work and the news, but taking time to listen and be present may require only a few minutes and will go a long way in building strong connections.
- **Show compassion and validate others' perceptions.** Allowing other family members to express their negative emotions or worries without minimizing or dismissing them will reduce anxiety. If they see that their concerns don't scare you and that you have a plan, the concerns become less frightening. Validating thoughts and feelings is an important tool for everyone in the family.
- **Give hugs.** Studies have shown that hugs can provide calming effects and can assist in forming strong bonds and connectedness.

Material 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](#)
n.a. (2018). *Social connections: Protective and promotive factors*. Center for the Study of Social Policy. https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/YT_Social-Connections.pdf



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Connectedness is important inside families, but connectedness to individuals and organizations outside the family also provide powerful support for resilience. The key components of **connectedness** are *mutual support, commitment, and teamwork or collaboration*. One idea to foster connectedness is to volunteer. Volunteering requires commitment and collaboration, and provides support. Big and small commitments can make an impact. Helping others has been shown to have positive physical and mental health benefits for everyone involved.

Volunteering can take many forms, and can focus on the immediate neighborhood or community, or anywhere in the world. Technology greatly expands opportunities to volunteer while staying at home.

Families choosing ways to volunteer should consider their strengths, values, and interests as individuals and as a group. Everyone can offer support, but each family will have a different way that is right for them. This is a good topic for discussion at a family meeting.

For this week's theme, we focus on volunteer opportunities that can increase connectedness with others both inside and outside the family. "Other-oriented" volunteering like supporting local service organizations or helping others directly has more positive health effects than "self-oriented" volunteering.

Opportunities Close to Home

Volunteering can be as simple as picking up groceries or doing outside chores for a neighbor. Choosing activities that all family members can participate in multiplies the benefits — each individual gains all of the benefits of volunteering, and the family as a whole gets stronger because its members are brought closer together.

Mother's Day is May 10th. Assisted living facilities and nursing homes are finding creative ways to celebrate mothers. Consider reaching out to a facility in your area to inquire about how you can help, perhaps by emailing, sending or mailing a note or card.

In local communities, the [United Way](#) addresses many community challenges and offer ways to volunteer — even virtually during periods of social distancing.

Another local option to consider is [donating blood at the Red Cross](#).

[Volunteer Match](#) and [All For Good](#) can match families with local volunteer opportunities.

Opportunities Around the World

[Zooniverse](#) offers opportunities for volunteers of many ages to contribute to interesting research projects aimed at increasing understanding and making the world. For example, check out the [American Soldier project](#).

Volunteering to be of use, no matter how small, can promote resilience at many levels. The psychological and physical benefits are substantial, even helping us to live longer.

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