



## Ten Coping Strategies for older Oregonians during COVID-19

Communities + Generations + Innovations



### Hello Out There!

The words will chill us for the rest of our lives: “social distancing” and “self-isolating.” You may feel as though you already have some experience with this, for instance, you may already spend much of your time alone. Even before the coronavirus, our society has been running a vast experiment in living alone, a model that has not been the norm throughout human history. Health experts in recent years have pointed to an “epidemic of loneliness.” Now Oregon’s stay-at-home directive doubles down on this isolation.

A cruel thing about the coronavirus pandemic is that combating it forces us to be separate from each other just when we need each other most. Here are three things you might try to stay connected to people outside your home. You might have to initiate these connections yourself. Could you trade 30 minutes of news viewing to dedicate to making friendly calls by phone or FaceTime? Are you willing to try to master unfamiliar technology? (Or, if you’re already tech wizard, could you help a friend learn Zoom?)

### Discover a new, free technology

From what we hear, the video conferencing software, Zoom, is being used for online meetups, virtual cocktail parties, and book clubs. A free version of Zoom allows three people to gather virtually for 40 minutes at a time. For details of how to set up Zoom calls, [go here](#).

New to this? Zoom seems to be the easiest video conferencing to learn, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t make sure there are no hammers within reach as you start. The helpless feelings of trying to learn something new from an impersonal robot or machine will drive the smartest person crazy. Be kind to yourself. Take it step by step. Resist the urge to shortcut or skip ahead in the instructions. Maybe give yourself a week as your learning curve.

Children in your care may enjoy Zoom because it allows them freedom of movement since they don’t have to be holding the phone-- for example, dancing together. They can also share screens for games or learning activities.

### Create a Circle of Care

A Circle of Care is a do-it-yourself way to check in on your neighbors and have them check in on you. The goal is to connect the people’s needs to local community helpers and services. A Circle of Care can be any size—an individual, or a group. If you are starting yourself, a circle of 3-5 people all checking in on each other is a good size.

Circles of Care aren’t necessarily being set up uniformly. Do what works best for you and your community.

You can help others, whether you are able to run errands or you are staying at home. If you are an organizer, you can help with coordination of a local group while other people are out doing the physical activities. You can start with a simple note left in a mailbox: "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I live at \_\_\_\_\_. Is there anything you need? Just want to chat? Call or text me at \_\_\_\_\_."

**AGE+** has more information to get you started [here](#).

## **Join a Facebook group**

From support groups to hobbyists and book clubs, Facebook offers community spaces for conversation and sharing. You may have to hunt for folks whose etiquette and interests match yours. Can't find one you like? Start a group! Or maybe like Groucho Marx, "I wouldn't want to be a member of any club that would have me as a member." That's okay. Not everyone is a joiner.

## **In the end, maybe Ma Bell is still best**

Do you remember the AT&T slogan, "Reach Out and Touch Someone?" Text messages lack the warmth and timbre of a voice. They are easily misunderstood. And you are not an emoji. Offer your voice to others out there. Make that call you've been thinking about.

Andrew Cuomo, governor of New York, experienced this when his daughter had to self-quarantine. "To tell you the truth, I had some of the best conversations with her that I've ever had," Mr. Cuomo told reporters. "We talked about things in depth that we didn't have time to talk about in the past or we didn't have the courage or strength to talk about in the past--feelings I had, about mistakes I had made along the way that I wanted to express my regret and talk through with her."

Your relationships with other family members or your children may make this seem impossible. But these are new times. You could make a call.