

# Concerns for Older Loved Ones in a Time of COVID-19

Many of us have older relatives and friends about whom we are concerned during the current crisis. In addition to being at increased risk from the virus, older people are more likely to already be more isolated than the general population and more in need of care at a time when it may be difficult, dangerous or impossible to be with them.

- **For older folks who can use video technology:**

Many older folks already know how to use tools like Facetime or Skype, or are tech-savvy enough to learn themselves or with help over the phone.

- As much as possible, replicate the days and times you would ordinarily see them by interacting via video.
- Plan times to interact. Scheduled activities reduce anxiety.
  - Ask them to read to your kids, or have your kids read to them, play an instrument, etc.
  - Play a board game via video
  - Make a date for coffee, tea or a meal.

- **For older folks who don't use video technology:**

- If they have the equipment but not the knowledge or setup, consider asking a low-risk person who is both knowledgeable and careful about infection control to go for a single visit, set up video technology, and show your older loved ones how to use it. Video is preferable to telephone because it more closely replicates in person social contact.
- Have regularly scheduled telephone contact and make it a routine.
- Kids stuck at home can make cards and write letters to older relatives and friends.

- **Ways to help besides keeping in touch**

- Go shopping for older folks and drop deliveries at the door.
- Contact the staff of care facilities and ask how your loved one is doing and for suggestions of things they might like or be comforted by. Give them tips of things that you know would be of comfort as well.

## Easing your own anxiety and guilt

Many of us have an unspoken and sometimes unacknowledged belief that we should care for our parents because they cared for us. Not being able to see older friends and relatives makes us feel guilty, and concern for their safety makes us anxious.

- **Give yourself a break.** You can only do what you can do. You are not a bad child, grandchild, friend, etc. for not being able to help right now.
- **Talk about your guilt with the older person.** Are they telling you it's OK? Allow yourself to believe them.
- If your loved one is not able to communicate with you or understand what is going on, **consider what they would have said about the situation were they their "regular selves."** Would they have told you it was OK? Believe that too.
- **Try to allow yourself to not think about future scenarios.** Uncertainty feeds anxiety, because we play all possible scenarios in our heads, experiencing the emotions of each one. Instead, assure yourself that you will manage whichever scenario actually happens when it happens, and give yourself permission to let the future tend to itself – it doesn't need your help.