

BOOMERS, ELDERS & MORE

A Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center



Over the last few weeks, our lives have shifted in ways we probably never imagined. We are consuming information daily about **COVID-19** as we witness its impact on our personal lives, our community, our nation and the world around us. Many thoughts and feelings come to mind as we navigate this uncertain time and as we try to imagine the road ahead. The weight of it all is so heavy. Remember to breathe. We will get through this...one day at a time.

The Vanderbilt Child and Family Center is keeping you in mind during this remarkable season. We encourage you to **STAY CONNECTED!** Make time to connect with your loved ones, friends and colleagues. A thoughtful check-in can go a long way for those feeling the sting of isolation while practicing "physical distancing."

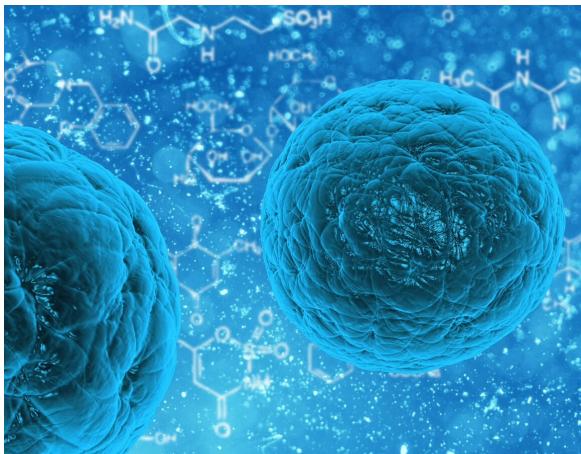
If you find yourself in need of resources for your family or yourself, the VCFC website has an offering of helpful information available:

www.vanderbilt.edu/child-family-center/resource-quick-links/family-life.php

MAY HOPE & PEACE FILL YOUR LIVES, NOW & ALWAYS!

COVID-19 Checklist for Older Adults: Prepare for the Coronavirus

*Tips from the CDC to get ready for an outbreak in your community
by Katherine Skiba, AARP*



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued detailed advice for older Americans who are at higher risk for more serious symptoms of COVID-19, the illness caused by the novel coronavirus.

People of all ages who have severe, chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, lung disease or diabetes likewise are at higher risk.

Here are key tips for older adults and their caregivers for preparing for a coronavirus outbreak in your community, adapted from the CDC's checklist for older adults:

KNOW THE SYMPTOMS

- If you develop COVID-19 symptoms including fever, cough and trouble breathing, call your doctor first.
- Some doctors offer telephone and “telehealth” visits to avoid the potential of spreading the virus to other patients and health care workers in the office.
- Not everyone who contracts the virus needs to be hospitalized. You may be able to recover at home. Follow your doctor's orders and CDC guidance on how to take care of yourself at home.

BE PREPARED

- Have a COVID-19 plan for yourself. Draw up one for your loved ones and review it.
- Have a list of your daily medications and time of day you take them. That way a caregiver will be able to help you if you get sick.
- Obtain at least a 30-day supply of your prescription drugs.
- Stock up on tissues and over-the-counter medicines to treat fever, cough and other symptoms should they arise.
- Have enough groceries and household items to be comfortable staying home for a few weeks. Make sure you have enough supplies.

- Draw up an emergency contact list.
- If you have a caregiver, make a backup plan for care in case he or she falls sick.
- If you are a caretaker, monitor your charge's food, supplies and medical needs such as oxygen, dialysis and wound care. And have a backup plan.

STAY AT HOME, HAVE A BUDDY

- Avoid sick people and crowds.
- Postpone travel, including airplane trips, and avoid cruise ships.
- Pay attention to the local news and follow the advice of local health officials.
- Stay in touch with others by phone, email and video chats.
- You might need to ask friends, family, neighbors or community health workers for help, especially if you become sick.
- Seek out a "buddy" who will check on you, help you prepare and stock up on supplies, and help care for you if needed.

PRACTICE HEALTHY HABITS

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow, then wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean your hands often. Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- If you don't have soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Clean — and then disinfect — surfaces and things you touch often. These include tables, chairs, doorknobs, light switches, elevator buttons, handrails, countertops, remote controls, shared electronic equipment, shared exercise equipment, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets and sinks.
- Here are instructions to clean and disinfect your home if someone is sick.

SEEK HELP

- Call 911 immediately if you are sick and your symptoms worsen.
- Worsening symptoms include, but are not limited to, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath; persistent pain or pressure in the chest; bluish lips or face.
- If you are a caregiver, also pay attention if your charge shows new confusion.

For the latest coronavirus news and advice go to [AARP.org/coronavirus](https://www.aarp.org/coronavirus)

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Checklist: Older Persons:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/retirement/checklist.html>

Virtual Connections Have Never Been More Popular

As people shelter in place, more are using smart devices to reach loved ones

by Michelle V. Rafter



Rich and Kirsten Meneghello on a Zoom call with Rich's mom, Margaret "Marge" Meneghello.

Rich and Kirsten Meneghello and their daughter Lucy have dinner with Rich's mom Margaret "Marge" Meneghello, 75, every Sunday, trading off between gathering at their house in southwest Portland, Ore., and Marge's apartment a few miles away. But they've been hunkered down in their respective residences since mid-March because of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, they had to figure out a different way to commune. Now they have a standing Zoom call every night at 7 p.m.; Zoom is a popular videoconference service.

Some nights they talk for a few minutes. Other nights they dial into Zoom to play Yahtzee, using separate sets of dice and adjusting their laptops so the built-in webcams show what they rolled.

"I've been using Zoom for work for a while, so for me it was a natural suggestion," Kirsten Meneghello said. "It's been lovely. Video is so much more valuable than the phone. You can see the person's energy and mood."

As people practice physical distancing in the wake of the pandemic, connecting virtually has become the next best thing to being there for staying in touch with older family members, whether they're a few miles away or across the country.

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"It's been a lifesaver on both ends during this quarantine," Elizabeth Vowles said. "She loves being able to see us and interact with us."

Video-calling services, connected tablets, smart-home assistants and other online devices have become lifelines for older people whose regular routines have been disrupted and for whom social isolation can lead to physical and mental health problems.

"The virus has been a way to prove that connecting virtually can decrease social isolation," said Liz Hamburg, founder of Cando Tech, a company that provides tech support to older adults. "It has been a testing ground to prove that this can be done."

Activating the 'Granny Cam'

Some families were connected long before the outbreak, of course. Last year, Marian Dolan was stuck in the Philippines for a month after her mom was hospitalized unexpectedly while the two women were there to visit family. Her mom, Luz Reyes, 81, recovered, but needs kidney dialysis three times a week.

Dolan set up in her parents' house in San Francisco a connected video camera she got at Costco for \$69 that she calls "the granny cam" — to keep an electronic eye on them from her own home in Portland, 600 miles away. A mobile app connected to the device streams real-time video to Dolan's phone. Since the outbreak, she checks in on her mom and dad, Vicente Reyes, 83, every day. "Sometimes in the middle of the night, I look at it to make sure they're okay," Dolan said.

The camera's audio channel lets her pop in to talk instead of calling on the phone, which her folks find more intrusive. "When I call, they want to get off the phone because they're in the middle of a Filipino soap opera," Dolan said.

When Brett and Elizabeth Vowles moved his 86-year-old mother into an assisted living apartment in the Seattle area last year, Brett set her up with an Amazon smart-home device with a small screen and an Alexa digital assistant so they could make video calls.

The virus outbreak has hit Seattle especially hard — 2,580 cases and 132 deaths as of March 25 — and people have been sheltering in place there longer than almost anywhere else in the country. "It's[the video calling] been a lifesaver on both ends through this quarantine," Elizabeth Vowles said. "She loves being able to see us and interact with us."

Getting Tech Support

Other families saw the coronavirus outbreak as a sign to get connected. Hamburg deals with a lot of them. Candoo Tech, which is New York-based, teaches older adults how to use smartphones, tablets, computers and safety devices such as fall detection devices and home sensors. It also provides subscription-based in-person and remote tech support.

Normally, the two-year-old company's concierges make house calls across the tri-state area. That stopped in mid-March because of the outbreak. Since then, Candoo Tech ramped up online support for people who need help and created free online tutorials for FaceTime and Zoom and online shopping apps for using Amazon and Seamless.

The company is fielding a lot of calls from people who now need help getting tech things set up. One woman wanted assistance learning WhatsApp, the Facebook-owned messaging service, so she could use it to talk to a son living in Europe. Candoo also assists its partner organizations helping their members stay connected. One is a New York City synagogue that switched all its in-person adult classes to online learning. "One of our last in-person sessions was at one of their classes to teach them how to get on Zoom," Hamburg said.

Stumbling Blocks

Despite the best intentions, however, this kind of technology doesn't always cooperate, as I can attest from personal experience.

Close to 20 family members dialed into a Zoom party I hosted for my dad's 84th birthday on a recent Saturday night. One of my siblings gave my father and mother a quick lesson before the big day. My parents used the assigned link and access code to call in at the appointed time. But a bad Wi-Fi connection in their condo made it hard for other partygoers to see or hear them.

And establishing a solid virtual connection isn't always about the technology. Some older adults need a little coaxing — not because they're technophobes, a tired stereotype.

Carri Bugbee bought a tablet as a birthday present for her mom Connie, who turned 75 on March 22 and lives in Eugene, Ore., a two-hour drive from her daughter's home in Portland. But her mom is not convinced she needs a tablet. "She wasn't happy because she doesn't like people buying her things," Carri Bugbee said.

“With church services and volunteering canceled, family get-togethers are more important than ever.”

Connie Bugbee lives alone, doesn't have a computer and cut the cord on cable TV after retiring last year. Because of the state's shelter-in-place order, she can't see her significant other. She thinks she should be able to get by with a phone, but Carri Bugbee thought it would be easier for her mother to video-chat, read e-books and watch her favorite British murder mysteries on something bigger than a smartphone screen.

So, Carri bought a Samsung tablet, added it to her own T-Mobile account and spent hours downloading apps and setting up accounts in her mother's name. Then she mailed her the device. Despite the initial misgivings, by the second day, Connie had downloaded a few more apps. “She seems more interested and receptive,” Carri said. “I've realized I have to break her in slowly.”

Now Adept at Zoom

When Oregon's shelter-in-place order took effect, it curtailed an active social life for Marge Meneghelli revolving around church, volunteering at a local library and after-school program, as well as seeing friends and family. With church services and volunteering now canceled, family get-togethers have become more important than ever.

Thanks to the nightly calls, Meneghelli has become so adept at Zoom, she uses it to chat with church friends, Kirsten Meneghelli said.

The stay-home order canceled an early April trip to Alabama that Marge had planned to see a sister whose husband died recently (not of the virus) and another sister who lives there.

Instead, the three sisters connected — how else? — through Zoom.

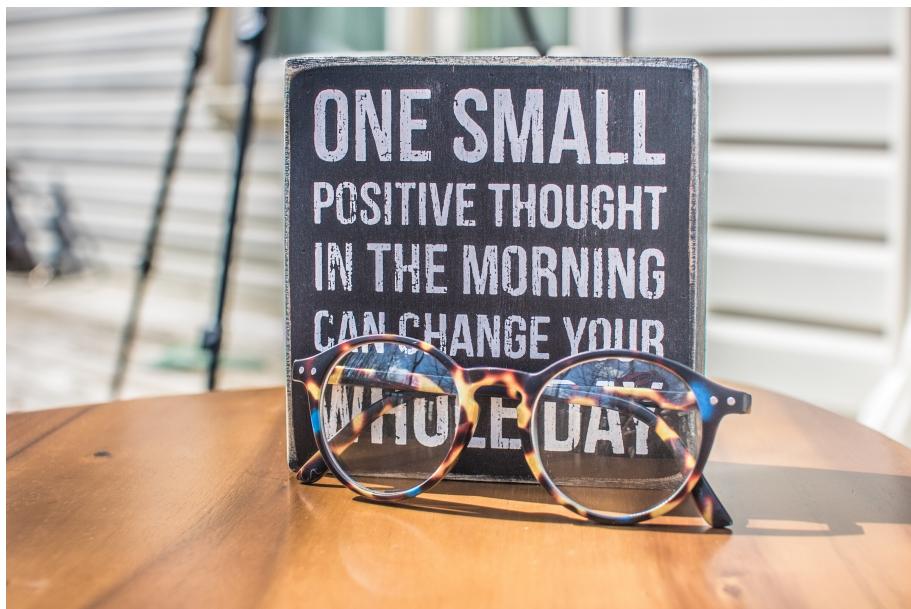
Candoo Tech Tutorials: <https://www.candootech.com/howto-offerings>



Michelle V. Rafter is a Portland, Oregon, business reporter and long-time chronicler of the intersection of technology and work.

Keeping Caregiver Spirits High During the Coronavirus Outbreak

Shift your mindset and activities, focus on the positive
by Barry Jacobs



Seven years ago, when my mother's fever spiked so high that she was mumbling deliriously, I called 911 and waited in terror for the paramedics to arrive, suddenly frightened about what was going to happen. Two large men soon strapped her to a gurney and rolled her out quickly, then loaded her into the ambulance and sped off. I followed in my car. Within the hour, I was told by a young doctor in the stark emergency room hallway that my mother had a raging lung infection due to community-acquired pneumonia and was close to death.

Over the next 12 hours — while her outcome was in doubt as the nurses pumped her full of antibiotics through an IV tube — I despaired. I cried to my wife, “I’m not ready for my mother to die.” I paced her hospital room wondering how this crisis had arisen so quickly. I questioned myself about whether I could have prevented her infection. If she didn’t recover, how would I handle her loss and the void I would feel? (She did thankfully rally and survive.)

We are now in a global pandemic in which many family caregivers will likely experience the same kind of shock, uncertainty and fear I did. We worry that COVID-19 may sicken our loved ones or as caregivers that we may somehow bring the virus into our homes. We also fear that we might fall ill and leave our care recipients in need. These are dire moments that can bring out the best or worst in us. It requires our holding on to hope that the pandemic will eventually be brought under control and the people we love will survive.

"Hope gives us strength. It bolsters our resilience. It pushes us on when we don't think we can do any more."

There is no single means for finding hope. Many family caregivers draw deeply on their faith; others on individual grit; some on others' inspiring encouragement. As this crisis unfolds, what are other ways for generating the hope that caregivers and their loved ones will avoid contracting the virus or pull through if they do? Here are some psychological ideas:

Monitor your temperament

Through our temperaments and upbringing, each of us is typically inclined toward regarding the world through the lens of a brooding pessimist or a beaming optimist. These tendencies only become more pronounced under the duress of a crisis. Pessimists usually argue that fearing the worst better prepares them for possible catastrophe. But research by psychologist Martin Seligman and others shows that optimists are happier and less prone to anguish and depression, even when danger is realistically present. Do you have a sense of your natural tendency? If you don't or are simply interested in gauging your thinking's direction nowadays, keep a daily journal in which you record your current preoccupying thoughts and save that document to be reviewed in, say, a week. Rereading those entries will quickly clue you in to where you are psychologically and allow you to determine whether you need to take steps to better cope with the current crisis.

Shift your mindset

Since optimism is better for us, take steps to enhance your cautiously optimistic thinking. For starters, you could bring your attention more fully to some of the unforeseen benefits (amid many detrimental effects, admittedly) of this halt to our normally hectic lives: a greater chance to see the flowering springtime and hear the repetitive calls of the migrating birds; the opportunity to enjoy the company of your family members; and the time to reinvigorate long-dormant home-cooking skills. Keeping a gratitude journal is another means of heightening our awareness of the good things we still have.



Shift your activities

In the same way that directing your thoughts can lead to a more hopeful outlook, directing your activities can do the same. It is potentially harmful to watch 10 hours of cable news shows at this time; the sheer volume of frightening images and information will take its toll on your psyche. Keep informed but balance news-seeking with engaging in cherished activities that bring you joy and perhaps laughter like reading, playing games or listening to music.



Reach out to positive-minded friends

It is more vital than ever to virtually reach out to friends and family members for support by sharing experiences, fears and well wishes. But those conversations shouldn't be so gloomy as to reinforce your hopelessness or deepen your despair. Find the folks who can sustain a more balanced and realistic view, recognizing these negative times but positive possibilities as well. Let them spur you to hang on to the belief that — despite the painful losses we have suffered or will suffer — better times will eventually come. We will hurt but we will grow through overcoming this national adversity.



*Barry J. Jacobs, a clinical psychologist, family therapist and healthcare consultant, is the co-author of the book *AARP Meditations for Caregivers* (Da Capo, 2016). Follow him on Twitter and Facebook.*



VANDERBILT CHILD & FAMILY CENTER

CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

Join us for our first virtual support
group meeting using ZOOM!

TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 2020
12:00-1:00 PM

Please email:
toya.y.cobb@vanderbilt.edu
to receive meeting details