

# Staying connected during COVID-19

***Presenter – Lynn Borteck, Clinical Counselor***

Hi, this is Lynn Borteck and I'm bringing you today's webinar which is Staying Connected During COVID-19. I'm a licensed clinical social worker and marriage and family therapist and I can tell you that even without those credentials I can tell you that it is terrible important for you to stay connected during this period of time when we are socially and physically distanced. It is more important than ever to stay connected and we're going to be talking about that today.

## **Social distancing is not the same as social isolation**

Social distancing which is what's going on for most of us is not the same as social isolation. Social distancing is temporary, it is a safety measure to help stop COVID-19 from spreading. Isolation is chronic, it's not just temporary, it's chronic and it's loneliness. It can lead to you being depressed or anxious and it can even lead to heightened health risks and health outcomes that are bad. So the challenge is to follow social distancing guidelines but not create more health risks by isolating ourselves.

## **Understanding the differences**

Here's the difference again. Social distancing is temporarily maintaining that safe distance. At the same time, social distancing opens the door to lots of other ways of connecting and those ways require creativity and effort and all of that is really good, it's really bringing out a lot of good in people and we'll see how later. So it's well worth it to find ways to stay social while you're at a physical distance because your mental health and your physical health will both benefit.

On the other side is social isolation which is really often associated with being depressed, unhappy, not deriving pleasure out of life. People who are isolated tend to have habits that are less healthy than other people and those are habits that increase their health risks. Perhaps they smoke and we know that smoking is not good for you. That's just one of the health risks that tend to be associated with social isolation. So social isolation doesn't lead to creative ways of connecting like social distancing may but it leads to a lot of pain, the pain of loneliness.

## **We have lots of options to distance but stay connected**

So there's lots of options. This is really a heyday for technology, there's lots of ways to stay at a distance but still stay connected. There's email and text and Skype and Facebook and Zoom and Google Hangouts and lots of different platforms. There are new platforms emerging all the time. You have to use them carefully because sometimes I think that there are some hacking and scamming being done on some of these. But used with care, these are all really great ways to connect and you can even pick up the phone and make an actual phone call to somebody.

## **Exercising with friends**

Here's a great idea, how about exercising with friends? You can do this, you can set up a video meeting with a platform that you're familiar with or that you can learn about and you can actually work out together with friends so that you're doing this online, you're socially distanced, you're doing it in a virtual manner but you're together, you can laugh together, you can compete if you like to, you can encourage and motivate each other. You can also go online and search for group workouts like Pilates or Zumba and you can take part in virtual online classes.

## **Giving to others is a social connector**

Another wonderful way to stay connected is volunteering and again, we need to volunteer pretty much virtually. You can do this by calling somebody who you know is alone, you can call them once a day, once a week, whatever works for you. You can definitely stay in touch with family and friends by using Skype and FaceTime and all kinds of other platforms, or phone, email, text.

I have to tell you, I actually received a paper letter from my grandson the other day and he only lives 15 minutes away but I haven't been able to see him and give him hugs and kisses in almost a month now, maybe more than a month. And I miss him. And it was awesome to get an actual paper letter and of course paper letters from eight-year-olds are always fun and funny and keepsakes for sure.

So find ways to stay in touch and also connect with your town or your church or synagogue, or whatever your religious or faith organization is to find out if they have volunteer groups. You might be able to use your skills to volunteer with projects that they have.

Or you can even start a volunteer project of your own. I know somebody who started a charity, small charity where she's collecting money, online again, or through the mail, people sending her checks and then she is in contact with a local deli that's open just for takeout and she uses the money to have the deli send food to the emergency room staff because most emergency room staff can't

leave to get food once they've entered. And so this is a great thing she's taken on a wonderful project to help other people.

Now in every case, I do want to caution you to follow what your state is telling you to do about distancing. So if you do decide to get involved in anything outside of your home like dropping off groceries or something like that, you're still keeping yourself safe.

## **Take a book club, discussion group or gab fest virtual**

You can also have a virtual book club, discussion group, or just a gab fest. You can, again, use wonderful technologies to come together and share ideas and maybe support each other, boost each other's moods when you need it. Talk and chat, you can have a book club where everyone reads the same book and then you have a discussion online. You can even have virtual game nights and movie nights by using online platforms.

## **Share occasions together**

I know there are a lot of occasions that we're missing out on but you know what? We can still share many of them again online. People I know have been to weddings and birthdays and anniversary parties and graduations and sadly, funerals, all of which are being held online and even religious milestones like confirmations and bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs and other milestones in our kids' lives, our grandkids' lives or our own lives. It can be done online.

## **Meet your neighbors**

What a great time to meet your neighbors. Just meet them at a safe distance. If you happen to live in a building with balconies, you can talk to each other balcony to balcony, you can even share dinner together, each of you bring your dinner out onto the balcony if it's warm enough. And you'll have a dinner date with a neighbor. Some people set up music, loud music, at decent hours in the neighborhood and everybody goes out on their balcony or in their windows and they dance and have a good time and it's almost like having a neighborhood dance party. There's also community scavenger hunts where you can set up with your neighbors different objects to look for like a shamrock in the window or a heart in the window, or other kinds of things that can be found by driving around with your family when this scavenger hunt is all set up and you want to start, you get in the car and drive around with your family and check off the things that you find that are on the scavenger hunt list. You can also have sing-alongs from windows and again, I do want to say of course if you have sing-alongs from windows, be careful of the open window and do be sure in all of these situations that you are following your state's rules and regulations.

## **Socialize online**

You can socialize online, I guess, you know, people have been doing this for a while now with things like match.com. But here's a perfect time for it. You can meet new people or even get together with your favorite people. You can plan dinner dates or coffee dates. You can even use various platforms, I hear there's something called Netflix Party where you can all get together virtually and watch a movie or watch a TV show and be able to comment to each other about it. You can even read to each other, I have one friend who has a reading date with her grandchild online every night, they FaceTime and she reads her a story.

## **Learn something new**

Good time to learn something new. Maybe there's something you haven't had time for before and even though you might be working from home, maybe you have a little bit more downtime. So you can go online, my goodness, there's so much online. There are TED Talks which you can access, you can put in TED Talks on your search or go to YouTube and put in TED Talks. You can do tours of museums around the world are available online, you can even learn a new language online. And there are so many other events and trainings and courses. I know that one of our local groups had a magician on Zoom the other night and kids were all invited to watch this magician via Zoom. It was great.

## **Share your talent**

Share your talent. How about inviting your friends and ask them to invite their friends and have a great concert of your own virtually? You can give a performance in a video meeting room of some kind, you can host a sing-along, you can try karaoke, and also it's a great encouragement for other people, the stand-up comic who never got to pursue that career, what a great time. Let him or her do his stand-up routine. A magic as I mentioned before or singing or whatever.

## **Stay in touch with colleagues and friends**

Do stay in touch with your colleagues and your friends and if you're working at home online, you can pretty easily stay in touch with colleagues, you can share projects if that's appropriate and be able to work together, talk together. You can have lunch together using video tools and of course have team meetings or meetings with other coworkers, again, using video conferencing.

## Getting more help and support

Now these are all great ideas and I hope that some of them have perked up some ideas of your own. However, I do want to say that it's a really rough time and if you need more help and support, please get it. That's why professionals in therapy and counseling exist. So if you need some more support, call your EAP and see if you can talk to someone over the phone about how you're feeling. Or you could call your insurance carrier, your health insurance carrier and find out if they can refer you to an in-network counselor or therapist who is doing tele-video. Lots and lots of therapists are doing tele-video right now and it's really a godsend I have to say for people who really are lonely or are feeling frightened or anxious to get more help and support and it's great.

I want to close with this slide. "I think that when the dust settles, we will realize how little we need, "how very much we actually have, and the true value of human connection." – Becoming Minimalist

I think that is so appropriate to what we talked about today. It's that human connection that really matters, that keeps you going, that can lift your spirits and keep your spirits high. Use what you have, use your phone, use your email, use your computer in new ways, learn some new ways to connect with these various online platforms. Please stay socially distant but please don't isolate.

Good luck and stay well.

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