

# Your Social Distancing Survival Guide

Reprinted from *The Mental Health Association's*  
*"Your Mental Health – 2020 Toolkit"*

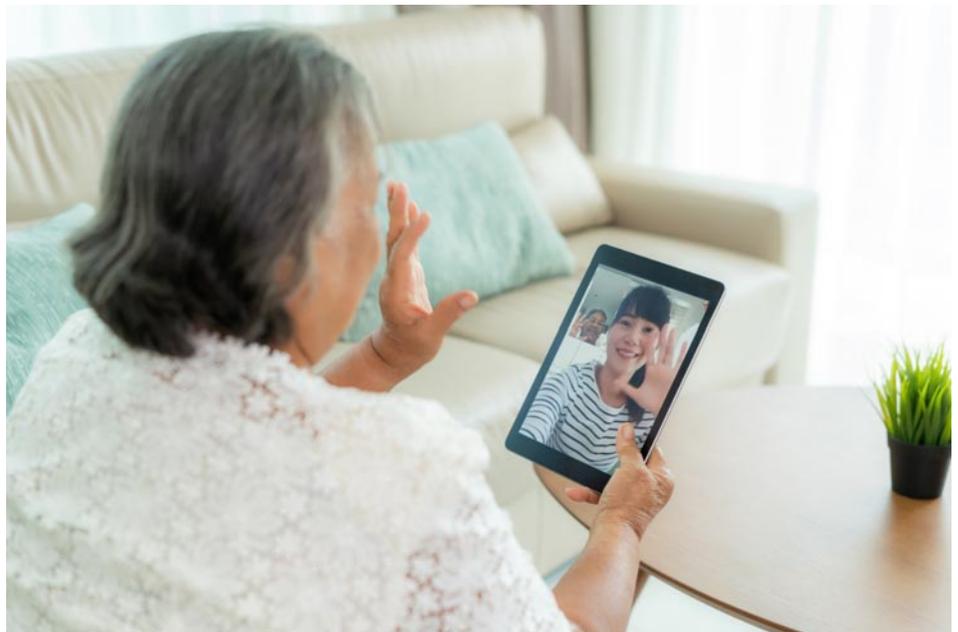
**W**e are used to having built-in ways to connect. We connect at school and at work, at events and social activities, even with our neighbours in the grocery store. We have visited and we have socialized. And maybe, until now, we've seen all of that connection as simply a part of our everyday life. We can't any longer. For the time being, it's not a built-in feature of our lives. We have to go looking for connection and we have to be creative. We need to make an effort to reach out to each other.

Here's your guide to connecting with others in these difficult times:

**Make it part of your routine.** Set a time, or several times, over the course of the day, and call it "social connection time." This will be a dedicated time when you forego all distractions and check in or share with others—like on your morning walk.

**Make a date.** Book a time for a conversation. Send an email or a message, or just call someone spontaneously, inviting them to a phone date, or a video chat.

**Schedule it in.** Just like you would a meeting (or a dentist appointment) write the time in your agenda or put an alert on your phone. "At such and such an hour, I'm going to reach out to a friend, colleague or family member." They want to hear from you right now.



**Let yourself be vulnerable.** If you're craving connection, let others know. Let them know you feel isolated. Deepening your conversations will deepen your relationships.

**Be honest.** If you're not doing well, don't cover over the feelings. Share them openly.

**Be generous and kind.** Kindness can actually work to counter stress which is particularly important in these times. Send out a few words of gratitude on social media or send a kind message via email. This will make someone's day and is itself a meaningful connection.

**Practice listening.** Really listen to each

other and give the other person space to let you know how they are really feeling, too. See our Tips on how to really listen and our Listening Checklist for building listening skills. Learning to listen actively and carefully is key to having meaningful social interaction.

**Think outside your circle!** Your family members and good friends aren't the only sources of social support. Who has offered you support in the past? This might be a good time to reconnect.

**Join a virtual community.** Go ahead and join a group, virtually. There are Facebook groups on just about everything and now is a good time to find community. Go to Facebook and search the

name of the activity or kind of group that interests you using the search tool (magnifying glass) at the top of the screen.

**Slide into your DMs.** Giving and getting likes on social media is one thing but sending and receiving direct messages (DMs) can spark deeper, more meaningful connection. So, don't just scroll through posts. Send a DM to someone who has been supportive in the past, or who seems to need support.

**Remember the telephone and low-tech ways to connect.** The phone may have been invented two centuries ago, but it is one of the most enduring and important tools for social connection that we have. If you want to reach someone long distance, you can use Skype audio, or WhatsApp, which both offer free services. Letter writing maybe a lost art too. Corresponding by mail is a great way to reach out and connect. Canada Post is still there for you. So is your email account.

**Make the most of high-tech.** Use video technologies, like Skype, Facebook or Messenger. Sign up for free. All you need is a computer with a camera, or a smart phone. Don't be shy: video is



face-to-face time when you can't be side-by-side. If you still feel shy: turn off the video view of yourself. This might help lighten feelings of self-consciousness.

**Plan a virtual event.** Participating in group activities can bring you closer to your friends, family, and members of your community. Zoom (zoom.us) is a free video platform that was created to host virtual meetings, but has become a central meeting space for people looking for opportunities to socialize. Here is a partial list of social activities you could host on Zoom: dinner party, play

date, singalong, game night, trivia contest, book club meeting, coffee breaks or slide shows! Be creative, laugh at yourself and learn from your mistakes as we muddle through this new way of connecting—together.

**Remember you are not alone.** Maybe most importantly, know that even if you feel alone, there are others out there, ready and waiting to help. If you're struggling:

- **Find a support group.** With a simple Google search you can find online support groups and peer support services to engage on issues that matter most to you. Or get some peers together and host your own support group on Zoom.
- **Use e-mental health services.** There are hundreds of online portals and hubs to connect you to virtual and online support services such as online courses, coaching and therapy. Check out the Government of Canada's new Wellness Together portal, or check in with your local CMHA to see what they have to offer online and over the phone.

In crisis? Please call 1-833-456-4566 toll free (In QC: 1-866-277-3553), 24/7 or visit [www.crisisservicescanada.ca](http://www.crisisservicescanada.ca) ♦

