

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AND OLDER ADULTS: COMBATING SOCIAL ISOLATION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY



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As occupational therapy and assistive technology practitioners, we understand that successful use of technology as an OT intervention involves providing both a device and a service (evaluation, training and implementation) that accompanies it. We recognize that training is necessary for successful uptake of these devices and recommendations. However these are challenging times and many of us are looking for suggestions that we can use to try and prevent social isolation and boredom both which become threats to occupational engagement and wellness. In that spirit, we pulled together this list of resources that might be useful to reference for use with clients, family and friends.

These resources include recommendations that may assist older adults with communication and prevent social isolation to support quality of life during these times of social distancing. In addition, there are some strategies you can refer to for building your own tutorial videos of these technologies or providing remote support to individuals that are less familiar with technology and may need some additional guidance to access and utilize these services.

Communication Platforms and Services

More than ever, older adults are facing increased risk towards loneliness and the negative health consequences that accompany it. This is particularly true for those with limited or no support systems who rely on in-person programming, community/senior centers, and community interaction for their emotional and social support.

Combating social isolation can be as simple as a phone call though and fortunately there are many communication tools that we can introduce to accomplish this goal. This list includes some services that are designed to provide phone calls to older adults who may not otherwise have regular social interaction as well as services for those with limited support systems or who wish to expand their social networks. These recommendations include platforms and products that can enhance communication with family members and friends, and creative use of some existing tools to promote engagement.

- Institute on Aging Friendship Line
 - <https://www.ioaging.org/services/all-inclusive-health-care/friendship-line>
 - Institute on Aging's 24-hour toll-free Friendship Line is the only accredited crisis line in the country for people aged 60 years and older, and adults living with disabilities. They also make on-going outreach calls to lonely older adults. The Friendship Line is both a crisis intervention hotline and a warmline for non-emergency emotional support calls.
- Papa
 - <https://www.joinpapa.com/virtual-companionship-visits>
 - Papa's mission is to support families throughout the aging journey. During virtual companionship visits, Papa Pals will support members by teaching them how to leverage available telehealth tools, virtual house call services, order groceries to their home, pharmacy benefit services and other benefits provided to them by their health plan, provider, or employer. Members typically receive the Papa service at no cost through health plans, employers, provider organizations, and social services organizations.
- Three Chairs
 - <https://www.three-chairs.com>
 - Three chairs is a service that schedules weekly calls for you with new friends. These calls give you, or a loved one, the opportunity to talk with others about your favorite topics, activities, or about things going on in your life. Because each call starts with a moderator, you don't have to worry about the complications of dial in numbers or pins, you just have to be near the phone at the scheduled time, and they will call you.
- Stitch
 - <https://www.stitch.net/>
 - Stitch is a community which helps anyone over the age of 50 find the companionship they need. Their vision is to help improve the lives of older adults in every country around the world and provide an answer to the social isolation and loneliness that everyone ultimately faces at some point in their lives, whether they're seeking friendship, romance, or anything in between.
- Famli.net:
 - <https://www.famlinet.com/>
 - FamliNet is a platform used to message loved ones with an easy-to-use and easy-to-learn webapp. Designed for older adults to connect with family, friends and the world via the Internet.

- Grandpad
 - <https://www.grandpad.net/>
 - GrandPad® is designed with seniors in mind – the innovative device comes with features for connecting with loved ones, without the complicated features of other tablets. The large buttons and intuitive interface make the GrandPad a simple tablet for seniors who are ready to start video chatting and sharing memories with family and friends around the world.

Virtual Conference Platforms

Communication has never been so dependent on technology until the COVID-19 virus altered our typical forms of socialization. Companies, like Microsoft, Skype, Zoom, and Amazon, have created ways to combat that lack of interaction through technology. Here are some platforms to continue engaging in social interaction:

- **Disclaimer: These resources listed below are examples of different social platforms. If you are currently comfortable using your own preferred virtually interactive platform, continue to use that platform.**

- **Microsoft**
 - The Office 365 Microsoft Team eliminated the cost for individuals who wish to collaborate academically or practically way through video meetings. Microsoft Skype can be downloaded to any device through its website, Google Play, or App Store.
- **Zoom**
 - Unlike Microsoft Team and Skype, Zoom can support a large population of people through an easily installable app. Windows iOS, Android, and macOS can all support the app and its ability to share the screen as well as recording meetings. The zoom website has several tutorial videos to guide individuals through step-by-step instructions.
- **Amazon**
 - “Drop In” Feature:
 - Amazon Alexa and Amazon Echo both offer this feature where a simple voice command allows individuals to make contact through hands-free calling to other individuals with an Amazon device. In comparison to Amazon Alexa’s auditory system, Amazon Echo has a built-in camera and screen to allow for visual and auditory feedback. Individuals who may be technology challenged may find the “Drop In” feature helpful to naturally interacting with family, friends, and peers by simply verbally accepting the notification.

Promoting Activity Engagement in the Home:

As occupational therapy practitioners, we know how critical engagement in everyday occupation is to overall health. Here are some sites which can help you stay active physically and virtually.

- **National Institute on Aging**
 - National Institute on Aging offers some virtual exercise programs for older adults to encourage activity:
 - <https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/workout-videos/>
- **Senior Learning Network**
 - Offers live video conferencing technology to deliver life-long learning programs to groups of older adults
 - <http://www.seniorlearningnetwork.com/>
- **Senior Planet**
 - Senior Planet's mission is to harness technology to change the way we age. Their courses, programs, and activities help seniors learn new skills, save money, get in shape, and make new friends. They are offering several virtual options for continued connection including book clubs, virtual events including talent shows, lunch and learns and virtual fitness classes. There are also some great guides for this period of social distancing.
 - <https://seniorplanet.org/coronavirus/>
- **Cyber-Seniors**
 - Cyber-Seniors' mission is to bridge the digital divide and connect generations through technology. It does so through the development and dissemination of resources that enable community organizations to provide tech-training for senior citizens using an intergenerational, youth volunteer model. Youth are provided with lessons and learning activities to train them to act as digital mentors, and senior citizens gain access to effective technology training and intergenerational communities that keep them socially connected and engaged.
 - <https://cyberseniors.org/>
- **Seniorly**
 - Seniorly is an online resource for searching information about senior living facilities, assisted living and nursing facilities. They have partnered with Broadway and Hollywood stars to bring weekly performances to seniors and senior communities live on Seniorly's YouTube Channel.
 - <https://live.seniorly.com/curtainup/>

- **Books/Audio**
 - **Quarantine Book Club**
 - The Quarantine Book Club is a weekday virtual gathering of individuals at a Zoom conference. Two conferences are offered every weekday. Each conference is \$5 to discuss the literature with authors and other Quarantine Book Club readers.
 - <https://www.quarantinebookclub.com/>
- **Art**
 - **Social Distancing Festivals**
 - The website offers global art showcasings organized on a calendar full of live-stream performances of visual art, dance performances, theatre, opera, musical theatre, and music.
 - <https://www.socialdistancingfestival.com/>
 - **Collection of Virtual Experiences**
 - CNN has compiled a list of resources for individuals interested in the arts. The list includes virtual productions, museums, concerts, as well as other accessible culture.
 - <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/what-to-do-at-home-streaming-art-museums-concerts-coronavirus-trnd/index.html>
- **Museums**
 - **The Metropolitan Museum of Art**
 - The MET offers a wide variety of art collections online resources to learn about the architecture, art work, and conservation aspects of running their museum. Through MET Connections, they offer an option to ask various experts of the artwork questions about the MET collection.
 - <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/online-features>
 - <https://www.metmuseum.org/connections/>
- **Theater**
 - **The National Theater at Home**
 - The National Theatre is offering full-length productions every Thursday (7pm BST/2pm EST). These videos can be accessed on their YouTube channel. Select performances are free.
 - <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/>
 - **The Shows Must Go On**
 - Starting Friday, April 3, a new YouTube channel called The Show Must Go On began offering the opportunity to watch a different Andrew Lloyd

Webber favorite every week. Each show begins streaming on the channel at 2 PM (EDT) and remains accessible for 48 hours.

- <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdmPjhKMaXNNeCr1FjuMvag>
- **Alvin Ailey Dance Theater**
 - The full-length recording of Alvin Ailey Dance Theater is available for viewing. Also, the company released dance tutorials and performance videos.
 - <https://www.alvinailey.org/performances-tickets/ailey-all-access>
- **Opera**
 - **Metropolitan Opera: New York City**
 - The Met is offering opera performances every night and are available until the following day until 3:30pm.
 - <https://www.metopera.org/>

Education

There are several online resources for education and ideas specifically for seniors to engage in online courses during this time. Continuing to use the mind and engage in cognitive challenges can help with mood stabilization and overall feelings of productivity.

- **Coursera, Udemy and Udacity**
 - These online learning platforms all offer remote education and many of them offer courses for free.
 - Here are some ideas for online education for seniors:
<https://vocal.media/education/14-free-online-courses-for-senior-citizens>
- **[Balance](#)**
 - For those that might be assisting a family member or friend with Alzheimer's or dementia, Balance is an Alzheimer's caregiving app that facilitates tracking and sharing information about your loved one's daily progress and medications.
- **[Alzheimer's and Other Dementias Daily Companion](#)**
 - For those whose caregiving resources have changed during these times, this free app offers expert tips on dealing with different memory loss scenarios, as well as emotional support for caregivers and additional caregiver training materials.

Entertainment

The way we enjoy entertainment with others has changed, particularly for older adults in isolation, however, there are several ways to be connected and enjoy and activity together through various technology platforms.

- **Playing Cards**
 - Playing Cards is a website to play a number of games online through a virtual card table that organizes synchronized movements. Each game has a sharable link to send to other plays through email or text message. This is a great way to interact with family and friends in a fun intergenerational activity.
 - <http://playingcards.io/>

- **Watch Together**
 - Watch Together offers synchronized watching of YouTube videos as well as integrated chat rooms that support web cameras. The videos can facilitate conversation in reference to a wide variety of content on YouTube
 - <https://www.watch2gether.com/>

- **Virtual Photo Walks**
 - Virtual Photo Walks is an organization that helps individuals who are sick or physically unable to experience the world through a free real time live stream. Individuals or their family members fill out the invitation form for a chance to connect with the global community through Zoom platforms or GoogleHangout. This organization connects individuals of all walks of life through an interactive opportunity.
 - <http://www.virtualphotowalks.org/be-invited-to-virtual-photo-wa/>

- **National Geographic: 360 Degree Videos**
 - National Geographic offers an immersive opportunity to experience nature in a 360 degree view. Arrows in the upper right hand corner allow the viewer to move the line of vision in the video to see a range of landscapes.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLivjPDIt6ApRq22sn082ZCC9893XtV8xc>

Teaching Technology Virtually

For older adults needing some support to learn or navigate new technologies, creating tutorial videos is one way to support new learning and encourage retention of a new program or process.

- You can create your own tutorial videos for navigating a website or showing an online process. One easy and free option for creating online tutorials by recording your screen and audio is called:
 - Flashback Express 5 Recorder
 - You can access tutorials about using the software [here](#)
 - If you have a mac, here is a link on how to screen record on a mac with audio:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4vwzS1pnfg>

- Recordings can be uploaded to YouTube easily to be shared with patients, family and friends
- Sometimes new technologies can be difficult to navigate for older adults less versed in accessing a website or learning a new technology.
 - Remote log-in options allow a trusted individual such as a therapist, caregiver or loved one to provide remote support for teaching new technology to older adults.
 - Team Viewer
 - <https://www.teamviewer.com/>
 - This free remote viewing software allows a password protected option for logging into the desktop remotely in order to walk through support and technology troubleshooting. It allows remote access for teaching and return demonstration of new technology learning.

Technology-enabled solutions offer much promise to facilitate social connection for older adults, especially during this time when their ability to engage in face-to-face interactions is severely impacted. However, technologies can pose several privacy and security concerns due to their complexity and propensity to collect and communicate vast amounts of sensitive information. Therefore, older adults' adoption of technologies must be combined by efforts to educate them on ways to safeguard their privacy. To be successful, these efforts must build on an in-depth understanding of older adults' current perceptions and preferences about data privacy and security for these technologies, while also accounting for the varied ranges of physical and cognitive abilities of older adults.

Resources from credible sources are a useful entrypoint to educating older adults, and can offer simple, tangible measures that older adults can take to protect their safety and privacy.

AARP

<https://www.aarp.org/home-family/personal-technology/info-2019/privacy-for-seniors.html>

Summarizes 9 tips from AARP's new book "My Online Privacy for Seniors"

1. Adjusting cookie-related features to control ways a website collects and use information about you
2. Addressing vulnerability issues by encrypting your data
3. Using robust passwords
4. Awareness of fake websites
5. Using credit cards to handle online banking securely
6. Using social media wisely
7. GPS-based location sharing when sharing media online
8. Storage of data in the cloud
9. Customizing security settings on devices

Stay Safe Online, powered by National Cyber Security Alliance

<https://staysafeonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/STOP.-THINK.-CONNECT.-Online-Safety-Tips-for-Older-Adults.pdf>

1. Locking your devices to secure your information in case your device is lost or stolen
2. Being able to discern scam e-mails from legitimate ones (e.g. e-mails that create a fake sense of urgency or crisis)
3. Exercising caution before clicking on links (verifying legitimacy of sources)
4. Creating strong passwords and safe storage of passwords in a secure place away from your computer
5. Awareness of data perpetuity, even when one deletes messages, posts, and pictures.
6. Posting only about others as you would like to have them post about you
7. Owning your online presence by utilizing customization features offered in devices and websites

Resource Links and Description

Special thanks to Siobhan, Karl, Juliann, Sean and Shirley on the Enable Ireland AT Team for their research in attainable age-friendly resources that are listed above.

1. Dr. Milana Boukhman Trounce produced in partnership with Home Care Assistance to address Senior Care during the Age of Coronavirus:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zk-vIAAhzFw&feature=youtu.be>
2. Benefit of Alexa and Google Assistant:
<https://www.cnet.com/news/six-ways-alexa-and-google-assistant-should-respond-to-covid-19/?ftag=CAD6b2b181&bhid=&mid=12758238>
3. Amazon Links:
 - a. Amazon Alexa:
https://www.amazon.com/all-new-Echo/dp/B07NFTVP7P/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=amazon+alexa&qid=1585841347&sr=8-1
 - b. Amazon Echo: <https://www.amazon.com/Echo-Show-8/dp/B07PF1Y28C>
Set-up: <https://www.digitaltrends.com/home/how-to-set-up-your-amazon-echo/>
or
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=how+to+setup+your+amazon+echo+
4. Microsoft Links:
 - a. <https://youtu.be/tAqAtI6K7NY>
 - b. Set-up: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gq443Lx49gQ>
5. Zoom Links:
 - a. <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206618765-Zoom-Video-Tutorials>

- b. Set-up: <https://youtu.be/hlkCmbvAHQQ>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9guqRELB4dg>
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=how+to+use+zoom

Resources

1. <https://www.nami.org/covid-19-guide>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
4. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
5. <https://www.aarp.org/health/>

Additional Resources:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/04/03/older-adults-and-technology-use/>

<https://www.onefamily.com/talking-finance/family/twenty-good-social-networking-sites-over-50s/>

<http://caot.ca/document/7179/Ensuring%20occupational%20disruption.pdf>