The Magic of Being Together … Even If It Is From Afar

It’s the most magical time of the year when you gather together with those you love. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has upended those plans, leaving many families and friends isolated and apart during this holiday season.

We know that holidays without friends and family together can be tough, but you don’t need to face them alone. Start a new tradition, create new memories and enjoy quality time together... even if it’s virtually.

WAM is here to help with some ideas about how to get started.

Ideas for Staying Connected!

Staying connected with friends and family, even from afar, is easy. Simply call, FaceTime, Zoom, Google Hangout, or Microsoft Teams. The virtual options are endless.

• **Play games online.** Arrange a time, choose a game, and play together. Free options include:
  - Scavenger Hunts & Adventures
  - Fortnite
  - Words with Friends
  - UNO
  - Classic Games

• **Eat together.** Invite people to join you virtually while eating a holiday meal.
  - Maria Shriver’s Sunday Paper Dinner Club
  - Ideas and inspiration

• **Cook favorite recipes together.** Set up a time, choose a recipe, and cook with friends and family. Then set the table and virtually share as a group.
  - Online inspiration and kits available

• **Have a dance party** in your living room and invite your friends or family to virtually dance with you.

• Create a new holiday tradition and **read a holiday-themed book,** alternating narrators from one person to the next. Reading with children is a great way to spend time together, while helping them achieve academically.

• **Work on a craft project together** from afar. Creative arts impact our brains and allow us to be inspired and connected with others.
  - [https://www.artandhealing.org/stuckathome/](https://www.artandhealing.org/stuckathome/)
Research into the Importance of Socialization

Research shows that socialization helps boost cognitive function, while isolation and feeling lonely can dramatically raise the risk of cognitive decline and dementia. The “risk of Alzheimer’s disease is more than doubled in lonely persons compared with those who were not lonely” according to researchers.\(^1\)

Making sure we stay social and connected not only extends the length of our lives, but the quality as well. Studies show that being social decreases depression, improves overall mental health, and can reduce the risk for other diseases. In other words, when it comes to health and well-being, connection matters.

The issue of social isolation is so pervasive that the Motion Picture TV Fund (MPTF) created a program to help support members of their community live and age well. According to Scott Kaiser, M.D., the MPTF has “spent several years focusing squarely on developing programs to effectively identify and address social isolation and loneliness—facilitating meaningful connections for those in need.” The program has proven so effective that it has been rolled out to organizations across the country.

Benefits of Playing Games

Studies show that playing strategy games correlates directly with improved problem-solving abilities.

Conversation, card games, puzzles, and board games are good mental stimuli and help promote brain health. Games also stimulate the immune system and can help mitigate boredom and depression, both of which can cause cognitive decline.

Games can be fun activities that involve family and friends. This social dynamic also helps keep the brain active and engaged.

So enjoy connecting this holiday season, even if it is virtually, knowing your family, friends and brain will all be happier.

\(^1\)JAMA’s Psychiatry journal