



The Importance of Social Connections for Seniors: One Family's Story

Jil Freitag, MSW Intern, SHARE New Mexico

According to [Yvonne Michael](#), an epidemiologist at the Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center in Chicago, higher levels of social interaction, including peripheral interactions can have a high payoff for elderly folks. Greater social activities in seniors can contribute to more meaningful and healthier lives. Sometimes as people age, social connections can wane, leaving a sense of aloneness and isolation that can be emotionally and even physically unhealthy, in particular for seniors.

This is timely as we discuss Covid-19 and its effect on seniors who, if they felt isolated before, may feel even more so now. It is important for seniors to have people they can count on to help with daily tasks, and that may be a neighbor willing to go grocery shopping for someone who may not have family around. Things like this can help elderly folks feel cared for, increasing their feelings of trust and security; their "social capital".

My mother Dorothy lives in Henderson, Nevada; her husband, my stepfather passed away last year. Now, my mom is active, physically nimble, still getting on her hands and knees to wash the floor even. I tell her that is why she is so flexible and mobile because she still does her chores! Before COVID broke, she had a fairly steady stream of family visitors to entertain her and keep her company, but she, like me, likes her alone time she admitted to me one day. Now, though, COVID isn't just limiting socialization, it is stopping it, and she was feeling a bit lonesome she confessed.

That week she got a package in the mail from my brother Joe. She opened it and the note inside said, "press this button", and she was immediately connected via Google Duo to my brother on her new tablet! They were able to facetime each other, and Mom has been using her tablet a lot since then, happy to have the company of family, even though it isn't face to face. It "feels" closer and keeps her smiling.

The importance of social connections is so vital to everyone's emotional and even physical wellbeing, and now with being isolated, people are having to get creative in their interactions, whether it be playing a saxophone on the apartment rooftop for the neighborhood, or Facetiming your family to see their smiling faces and keep social connections going. These times are surely new and different, and we all have to forge new ways to stay connected to each other, and with ourselves, maintaining our own physical and emotional health, which can be challenging but so important.