

## Staying Close from a Distance

This holiday season will be unique and challenging for many seniors and their families. Staying connected will take some creativity, but the results will be worth the extra effort.

Here are some ideas to foster holiday spirit with your friends and family, even when circumstances ask us to be apart. Pick and choose what works best for you!

- ❖ **Phone Calls** – Phone calls are easy and nice to receive. Arrange to have different family members make the call and share special memories or an update on their day (a call from a child is especially touching). Look outside the family and reach out to special friends and arrange to have them called your loved one as well.
- ❖ **Video Chat** – Seeing each other makes a call even more special. Help your loved one learn how to video chat from their computer, tablet or phone. Zoom, Skype or FaceTime are quite easy to use. You could read a poem or segments of a story to your loved one each evening.
- ❖ **Daily Mail** – How lovely it would be to have mail every day! Enlist all your family members to take turns creating a Christmas card, note, letter, drawing or poem so that you mail something each day. If you really want to get creative, each day could be themed after the 12 Days of Christmas song. “*On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me, a poem about a tree*”. It would also be interesting to see when the mail shows up as well.
- ❖ **Daily Gifts** – On the same 12 days of Christmas theme, deliver or drop off a box that has 12 little wrapped presents. You can arrange to be on the phone or video chat with your loved one when they open their daily surprise.
- ❖ **Cozy Pyjamas, Slippers and Robe** – Make the best of staying home with a cozy, stay-in holiday by sending some cozy pj’s and a good book or audio book to snuggle up with.
- ❖ **Seasonal Decorations** – Drop off or deliver seasonal decorations to help make your loved one’s space feel festive. A pine wreath for the door, a seasonal flower arrangement or poinsettia, a mini artificial tree with lights.
- ❖ **Holiday Baking** – drop off a selection of family favorites. Does your loved one like fruit cake or mincemeat tarts, shortbread, or gingerbread cookies? If you don’t bake, how about some chocolates or other seasonal sweet treats?

- ❖ ***Holiday Baking over FaceTime*** – Set up the iPhones or iPads so that you can bake a special recipe together and then when it is all done you can also visit while enjoying the treats! This would be a great activity for grandparents and grandchildren.
- ❖ ***Family Newsletter*** – Do you write an annual family letter? Be sure to send it to your loved one as they'll feel more connected to read your update. If they are not able to read it themselves and are living in a care facility, email it to the administrator or care manager and ask that they schedule some time to read it to your loved one. Or you can read it over the phone to them as well.
- ❖ ***Hidden Treats and Clues*** - Parents (with Grandparent support) could hide a small treat each day for grandchildren. Then the grandchildren can call the grandparents for clues to help them find the treat. This would also work with the Elf on a Shelf doll. The grandparents could know the location of the hidden elf and help the grandchild find him or her with clues.
- ❖ ***Checkers or Chess*** – Play over video chat such as Zoom. The person with the board can move both their opponent's pieces with instructions provided.
- ❖ ***Bedtime Christmas Story*** - Grandparents read a holiday bedtime story to their grandchildren over the phone or Facetime.
- ❖ ***Socially Distanced Carolling*** - Families can stand outside their loved one's windows and sing a selection of Christmas or seasonal carols. If you are not keen to sing in a small group, enlist some friends and make a tour of it. You can stand socially distanced in your own cohort and meet at a few parents houses to do a carolling tour. Bring along music accompaniment via your phone if that helps! If you don't have any singers in your household, see if you can find a carol service from prior years online and listen to that together.
- ❖ ***Concert or Play*** – Do you have musicians or actors in your family? The artist(s) could video record or video chat their talents to share with their relatives. If the artist is the senior, they may need help to set up the recording or streaming technology. In fact, the adult children might need help too, I always defer to the youngest generation, they know how to do all that techy stuff! A recording might be nice so that the recipient can watch it over and over.
- ❖ ***Virtual Santa Visit*** - <https://www.jinglering.com/> This site hosts live chats with Santa. Multiple people can join via their phones and enjoy watching and hearing young children speak to Santa.
- ❖ ***Personalized Santa Message or Call*** - <https://www.portablenorthpole.com/> Portable North Pole is a site where you can create a personalized message from Santa or a phone call from Santa.

- ❖ **Advent Calendars** – Each day over the phone seniors and their grandchildren can open an advent treat. They could each have an advent calendar that they open simultaneously and enjoy the treat together or the senior can just enjoy the child’s delight in having a treat each day. Another idea is to make advent calendars for each other with special little treats inside.
- ❖ **Family Traditions** – Carry on with your normal traditions but do so over a video chat. If it is a tradition of opening one present on Christmas Eve, then do so together. Get creative and try to keep the same traditions but this year will be a particularly memorable version!
- ❖ **Holiday Movies** – Use Netflix’s free Teleparty feature. You can watch a movie with your friends or family at the same time with synchronized play back and group chat features. It works using Chrome on a desktop or laptop. Or go low tech and simply talk on the phone as you enjoy a holiday classic together. Make sure you all have unlimited phone minutes or a landline!
- ❖ **Share a Meal** – Drop off a special meal or jointly order from a favourite restaurant and enjoy the meal together over video chat or the phone. You can do this regularly by scheduling a weekly virtual lunch date. If your loved one is in a care facility, ask the care team to set up a tablet screen at the dining table for you ‘join in’ once in awhile.
- ❖ **Get Competitive** – Do a gingerbread house or cookie decoration challenge.
- ❖ **Holiday Photo Memories** – Create a photo book or video montage of photos from past holidays. An email with some photos attached can be easy. You can include photos of artwork or decorations that children have produced over the years. Perhaps add in any stories that go along with the images.
- ❖ **Moment Makers** - <https://www.momentmakersyyc.com/> This amazing artist and service will write a personalize song, perform and record it for your loved one. An amazingly touching service.
- ❖ **Virtual Games** – For the tech savvy there are several virtual games that can be played together. Google Jack Box TV for a selection of fun, interactive remote but joint games.
- ❖ **Virtual Church Service** – Many churches and temples are live streaming their services. Contact your loved one’s place of worship and find out how to access their services. A special seasonal service might be particularly meaningful.

- ❖ **Shared Gratitude** – Focus on the positives by sharing what everyone is grateful for. These are strange and challenging times we are living in but it helps to find the positives and be thankful and appreciative for them.
- ❖ **Meditation** - Being alone over the holidays may be upsetting or stressful. Share or give the gift of a meditation recording that can be used to bring calm and relaxation. Encourage your loved one to do some deep breathing. Write down what each person is thankful for and then read them to each other.
- ❖ **Puzzles** – These are a gift and a great way to fill some time. You can find so many types of puzzles that suit someone’s vision or dexterity requirements.
- ❖ **Fresh Air and Exercise** – Can you get together outside for a little walk or fresh air visit. It will do you a world of good!

#### Gift Ideas:

Many of these ideas involve using technology. If your loved one doesn’t have a computer, tablet or smart phone, a tablet might be a wonderful gift. They are easy to use and you can have it loaded with the right programs in advance.

Below is a stand that holds a smart phone or tablet so that the senior can more easily speak to their family.



*From all of us at Proactive Seniors, we wish you and yours  
a safe and healthy holiday season!*