

Here are a few suggestions for keeping our elderly family and friends, safe during this time:¹

1. At the individual level, elders and those in their kinship circles can create schedules to help them stay in contact with family, friends, and community. This crisis forces the family to be intentional about decreasing her isolation and loneliness. It's also a reminder to treasure those phone conversations. Letters and cards are wonderful, too, but hearing a voice is immediate and can open a space for your loved ones to process their own anxieties, fears, and even joys in the moment.

2. Encourage older Americans who must stay home to stay active if possible. Social distancing will also disrupt the exercise schedule of many older adults, such as swim classes or mall-walking groups that are often a daily source of fellowship and physical activity. We should encourage older adults to continue to get outside for fresh air and brief physical activity if they are able to do so. They can check in with a family member both before and after to ensure their safety.

3. Take an inventory of the older adults in your web of relationships and identify their needs. Calling them periodically to check on whether they need anything can be a big help. Do they need prescriptions picked up or groceries brought to their doorstep? Are they feeling sick? Are they [keeping up with other healthy medical practices](#), such as the seasonal flu vaccine? If they have pets, do they need any assistance with the care of their animals? How are they receiving news updates? For example, the National Council on Aging advises vigilance against email and phone scams claiming to offer a vaccine for COVID-19.

4. Recognize the importance of faith and religious practice to the well-being of older Americans. Religious involvement is very important to older adults, [more than half of whom](#) attend weekly worship services. Catholic dioceses are even [lifting mass obligations for seniors](#). Many other faith communities are encouraging older members to remain home, and many have already canceled worship services and studies completely.

5. Remember that elderly Americans may need help utilizing digital tools and navigating the online world. Digital means can be used to hold meetings electronically and to broadcast worship services and other events, as many churches are doing, but older members may need assistance in accessing these tools. This can also be an opportunity to introduce an older relative to YouTube videos of their favorite performers at a time when concerts or musical gatherings are being cancelled.

6. As they move out of the public eye, we must be intentional about moving closer to older Americans through other means that do not necessarily involve physical contact. Because age is a determining factor in the need to avoid crowds and public gatherings, we must also actively combat ageism. In the media and in casual conversation, we may hear insensitive remarks that disparage older Americans and their value. This is a time to remember that all humans hold intrinsic value; we should recognize and honor the experiences of the older adults around us as a way to acknowledge their worth.

7. UPDATED: Coronavirus: What Older Adults Need to Know²

¹ From an article on Institute for Family Studies.org

² <https://www.ncoa.org/blog/coronavirus-what-older-adults-need-to-know/>