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## Staying Connected During the Holidays – COVID Style

Source: Brandy VanDeWalle, Nebraska Extension

The holidays are usually a time filled with joy as many reunite with family. COVID-19 has certainly made this difficult for face-to-face interaction but that doesn't mean you can't find other ways to connect.

The holiday season often triggers stress and sometimes even depression because of additional pressures. This year, however, you are probably feeling a different type of stress – anxiety, disconnect, and lack of normalcy. While COVID-19 has added new challenges, it has sparked connection creativity for some people. Consider these options:

- Host a virtual holiday meal with friends and family. You could have people prepare the same special family recipes. Have everyone put their devices out of sight so you can talk while eating.
- Even though it might not be the traditional meal, consider using a meal delivery site like “Hello Fresh”, etc. to share the same food.
- Search online games to play virtually with family members. Google “free online games” and many options will appear. Even AARP has free games, including Atari! Just be aware that if you download an app, there might be add-ons that cost money and it might take some time to explore what will work for you and your family. You can even play card games at [playingcards.io](https://www.playingcards.io).
- Send care packages to family members to enjoy or for a special event when you connect virtually. For example, send a hot cocoa packet and small marshmallows and enjoy hot chocolate while virtually watching a movie together.
- Have a virtual cookie decorating party. Pick a recipe and make it together, virtually. Deliver to a friend or family member or mail cookies to those who might need a little extra cheering up.
- Try a gratitude bowl where everyone writes down things they are grateful for on a slip of paper placed in a bowl. During a virtual holiday meal, take turns reading aloud what is in the bowl.
- Thank people! Decorate your front yard with thank-you signs for essential workers, healthcare heroes, teachers, and other special people. Have your child paint rocks with kindness messages and set rocks in special places to brighten someone's day.

This might be a year to reflect on the things that really matter to you and find ways to allocate more time toward those activities. If you have kids, let them brainstorm for alternative plans and start new traditions. Help them validate their feelings of disappointment and sadness toward disrupted holiday traditions.

We are all navigating through these uncertain times together and it is okay to ask for help if things get too overwhelming. If you recognize someone in distress, use a caring approach in listening to them, then connect them to resources:

- Rural Response Hotline: 800-464-0258
- Nebraska Family Helpline: 888-866-8660
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800-273-8255