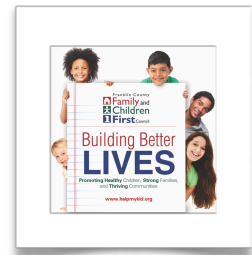




Staying Close While Social Distancing

*A Message from the Building Better Lives
Initiative of the Franklin County Family &
Children First Council*



Social distancing is important to slow the spread of the corona virus. However, we also know that relationships are incredibly important, especially during a crisis. So how can we maintain healthy and close relationships when we are forced to practice social distancing?

Increasing our understanding of how our brain works can provide valuable insight into how to maintain close relationships, and why it is vitally important.

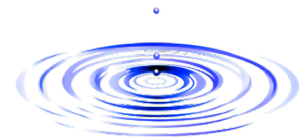
When we are under stress, relationships are really important!

Our brains are wired for relationships, and healthy human relationships are what keep humans alive. Think about a young child who falls down and immediately looks around to see if mom and dad are nearby to help. When we are hurt or stressed, we will instinctively look to connect with other human beings. Which is why this situation is so challenging. The very thing that our brains want (social interaction) is exactly what we must avoid in order to be safe.

Even though we must maintain *physical* distance, we can still be *socially* close and connected. In fact, the health of our brains and bodies depends on it!

A little goes a long way.

When we have a strong history of positive relationships, it only takes a small "dose" to receive the regulating effect. Just 5 minutes of connection with a loved one can have the same impact of a full hour together.



This is also true for individuals who do not have a strong history of relationships. Brief interactions that are *predictable* and *positive* will begin to build the template that people are safe, trustworthy and regulating.

Here are 4 suggestions to be intentional and effective with our social interactions



1. Make frequent social connections with people (from a safe distance!)

Relationships continue to be one of the greatest sources for regulation, even in a situation where social connections are limited. Fight the urge to isolate. Practical *physical* distancing but *social* connecting.

2. Make your social connections personal

Our brains love to see faces and respond to the non-verbals that are communicated when eyes light up and smiles widen. When possible, connect with people in the same room. When it's not possible to be physically present, telephone calls and video chats are better than texting. Think of that smile you hear in their voice on the phone. Wave and smile when you see your neighbors or others while out walking.

3. Make your social connections regulating.

Our brains need movement and rhythm in order to be regulated. When we can combine regulation with relationships, our brains *and* bodies feel safe and rewarded. Try to do regulating activities *with* other people, like taking a walk with safe distancing or while on the phone with someone, doing a puzzle, having dinner with a friend over a video chat, listening to music or cooking dinner.

4. Make your social connections **planned** and **purposeful**.

When we have fewer natural social connections throughout the day we have to intentionally increase the number of relational interactions. Schedule a phone call with your best friend, or set a reminder on your phone to video chat with grandma. Expand your typical list of people who you connect with every day to include neighbors and acquaintances from school or work. It might feel strange at first, but just like you, they will be happy to connect!



Summary

Relationships are crucially important for humans, especially in a time of crisis. Even though we must continue to practice physical distancing, we can continue to be creative and intentional about how we connect socially. Planned, frequent and personal interactions will increase our regulation and help us get through this difficult time, together!



For more information and resources, contact:

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