CRATER COMMUNITY HOSPICE

Celebrating Life Every Day

Family Caregiver Resources

Questions? Call Us!

804-526-4300

Helpful tips for family caregivers

Grandparenting in the time of COVID

The "COVID exile" has hit older adults particularly hard, adding isolation and depression to their high risk of dying from the virus.

This is especially so for the 70 million grandparents who have suddenly been cut off from their grandchildren, a major source of joy and affection.

Not only are daily lives diminished, but time is ticking. Children grow and change. No contact means missing out. And many older adults, especially those already in frail health, fear they could never see their grandchildren again.

If quality of life—having access to true delight—is more important to your loved one than safety, consider together the relative risks of in-person contact. Here are some guidelines:

Maximize safety. The safest are short visits, preferably outdoors, with masks, handwashing, and maintaining a six-foot distance. As bad weather increases, indoor visiting may be necessary. But it increases the risk. The fewer the number of people and the larger and more ventilated the room, the safer the visit.

Health and age of the older adult. Those over 85 are most at risk. The CDC reports added risk for those with cancer, chronic kidney disease, COPD, diabetes (Type 2), heart disease, obesity, sickle cell anemia, and compromised immune systems. Asthma and high blood pressure also increase the risk of getting sicker with COVID.

Health and exposure of the child. What makes interacting with grandchildren risky is that they can be infected without showing symptoms. Absolutely forego a visit if the child has a fever, sore throat, cough, runny nose, headache, diarrhea, vomiting, or body aches. Children can bring other illnesses, such as cold or flu. Make sure they are current on their immunizations. Children are typically exposed to more people. If a child is attending in-person school or day care, a visit is riskier than if a child has had little to no outside contact in the previous 14 days. Children are also less able to follow guidelines. Social distancing is hard for all ages, especially teens. Masks are impractical with children younger than two years.

Is travel required for a visit? If so, check out the viral transmission rates in both communities. If one is high, reconsider the visit. Avoiding airports is wise. Car trips are safer. But hotels, restaurants, and public restrooms require extra care. Consider quarantining for 14 days before the journey so everyone's exposure is low. A negative test before a visit may ease anxiety, but a test is only a snapshot in time. A person can get infected an hour later.

"With caution and a little creativity we've been able to keep my kids and my parents connected. That's been good for all of us!"

804-526-4300, OR TOLL-FREE IN VIRGINIA AT 800-275-4518

Crater Community Hospice supports older adults and their families in Southside Virginia.

Give us a call at 804-526-4300, or toll-free in Virginia at 800-275-4518 to find out how we can support you.

Getting the most from video chat

There is no doubt that video chat tools such as Zoom, FaceTime and Amazon Echo Show have made the isolation of older adults much more bearable. While not the same as an in-person visit, video chatting has been demonstrated to reduce depression in older adults by 50% when compared with other forms of connecting.

Video chatting with grandchildren is an art. Keeping their attention is a challenge, along with finding a "good time" to talk. Here are some tips you may want to go over with your loved one to help make video visits a positive exchange for all involved:

The physical environment. Pick a spot where the lighting is in front, not behind. "Backlighting" creates more of a silhouette, making it harder to see faces. Reduce background noise. (Turn off televisions. Move to a quiet room.) Mount phones or tablets on a tripod to free up both hands for gestures or showing off objects.

Create a routine. Make storytime with grandpa a regular activity before bed. Or maybe have grandma call while you are cooking dinner so the kids are entertained while you prepare the meal. Agree on a mutually convenient time that works for all three of you.

Prepare for the call. As the parent, ask your child what they want to share with grandma or grandpa and bring it to the phone station. Before handing the phone over to your child, give your parent a quick run down of interests in the last hour or day so they can be sure to inquire about activities that are top of mind. As the grandparent, have a favorite book or object at the ready that you want to share in return.

Bring out the inner hambone. The joy of video chats comes in the ability to interact. Kids love movement, silly faces and gestures that can be done together. Babies enjoy patty cake and peek-a-boo on video. And blowing kisses. Older children enjoy activities such as "Freeze Dance"—like musical chairs except the players freeze like statues until the music starts again.

Start with short, 5 minute visits. Work up gradually to longer visits as you all get used to this new medium.

Will we ever hug again?

Hugs are more than a symbolic display of affection. They have actually been shown to release oxytocin, the bonding hormone, which calms our nerves and reassures us that we are loved and we belong. Like everyone, older adults have a basic need to hug and be hugged. And grandchildren are often the joyful purveyors of sweet, soul-nurturing embraces.

One reason hugging is so dangerous now is that close proximity means we breathe into each other's air space. Since the virus is spread by tiny droplets in aerosol form, face-to-face hugs are especially risky.

Imagine that every exhale is like smoke. It wafts in the air, even from children, dissipating gradually over time. You can see why we wear masks!

According to aerosol specialists at Virginia Tech, there are things adults can do—and teach children to do—so that grandma and grandpa may feel safe enough to be back on the hug circuit.

- **Always wear masks.** They seem to protect both the wearer and the person on the receiving end of the hug.
- **Keep your hugs brief.** 10 seconds, and then step away to a six-foot distance.
- **Look away from each other.** Head-on or cheek-to-cheek hugs put you right in each other's jet stream. Instead, turn your heads so you are facing different directions.
- **Hold your breath.** From the time you approach to the time you step back. Another reason or cue to keep the hug short.

A hug around the knees or waist from a little one is fine. The adult should turn their head away so they aren't breathing down on the child.

An affectionate kiss on the back of the head is also relatively safe. Hold your breath and try not to exhale until you are appropriately distanced again.

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