



engAGED

The National Resource Center  
for Engaging Older Adults



Connecting You to Community Services

# Staying OK

## Tips for Supporting Your Social Connections and Emotional Wellness



The ebbs and flows of the COVID-19 pandemic have been hard for many of us. The pandemic changed the way we interact with others, often resulting in feelings of disconnection or isolation. The good news is that there are many ways we can stay connected and engaged with others—which can help us all stay encouraged and cope when times are tough.

## What Is Social Engagement?

Being socially engaged simply means connecting with others! There are many ways to stay socially engaged, including volunteering or working, taking art or wellness classes, and participating in social activities such as group meals, book clubs and more. All of these activities can take place in person, over the phone, on platforms like Zoom and Facebook or on public access television. Engaging with others in ways that feel safe can help you maintain connections with your community.



## Social Engagement Tips and Tools

The COVID-19 pandemic led many of us to change our routines and cut back on in-person interactions. Following the tips below can help us engage our minds and bodies—and stay connected to our communities.

### Maintain social connections

Connect with family and friends near and far over the telephone, through social media, on porch visits and walks, or through letter writing and emails. Share book, meal or television recommendations, reminisce about past experiences or plan fun activities for the future. Finding regular times to stay in touch with a friend can turn into events that you both can look forward to.

Staying socially engaged is related to better physical, emotional and mental health and well-being. For older adults, social engagement and strong social connections can likely decrease risk of disability<sup>1</sup> and depression<sup>2</sup> and even increase a person's lifespan.<sup>3</sup> Being socially engaged also enables you to share your knowledge, skills, experience and wisdom with others.

If you're looking for ways to stay connected to others, read on to discover tips and resources to support your social and emotional well-being!

1 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21300745/>

2 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34912487/>

3 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20668659/>

## Stay Physically and Mentally Active

Reach out to neighbors and friends to plan group walking dates or participate in fitness classes to establish regular ways to connect with others. Activities like drawing, journaling, writing a poem or short story, painting and knitting allow for creative expression and are another great conversation starter with friends and family. Inviting neighbors and friends over for games such as cards, puzzles or checkers are other ways to stay connected with others—on your porch, backyard or inside your home! Invite others to join you in visiting museums or attending cultural events virtually or in person.

## Build Purpose and Contribute to Your Community

Contributing your time and skills to support others through volunteering can benefit both communities and volunteers. Research shows that volunteering for as little as two hours each week can lead to improved mental, emotional and physical health, and helps us feel engaged and purpose-driven. You can volunteer by delivering meals or providing transportation to other older adults safely. Other volunteer opportunities include mentoring, serving on local boards or participating in a friendly caller program.

## Build Intergenerational Connections

Connect with younger adults or children to share your experiences and perspectives with other generations and build your community. Volunteering at schools or with youth organizations, mentoring college students, or offering cooking, music or other lessons are a few examples of community building activities you may find interesting and fulfilling.

## Find Social Engagement Opportunities Near You

Local organizations such as Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and Title VI Native American Aging Programs offer a variety of social engagement opportunities in communities across the country. Contact the Eldercare Locator, a federally funded public service for older adults, caregivers and others, to get connected to AAAs and tribal aging programs or other organizations that offer engagement opportunities in your community. You can reach the Eldercare Locator at (800) 677-1116, Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm ET or online at [eldercare.acl.gov](https://eldercare.acl.gov).





## Need More Support?

If you have concerns about your mental health beyond pandemic fatigue, such as depression, anxiety or other mental health concerns, consider:

- **Contacting your primary care physician.** Call your health insurance provider to find in-network providers if you do not currently have a primary care physician. Have questions about your Medicare coverage? Connect to your local Area Agency on Aging ([eldercare.acl.gov](https://eldercare.acl.gov)) or State Health Insurance Program ([www.shiphelp.org](https://www.shiphelp.org)). If you don't have health insurance, you can find a local community health center by visiting: [findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov](https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov).
- **Connecting to a mental health or behavioral health professional.** Contact your insurance plan to find in-network mental health or behavioral health providers or search for a mental health or behavioral health professional in your community through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration behavioral health treatment services locator at: [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov).
- **Calling a friend or family member.** Tell a friend or family member how you've been feeling. They may also be able to help you find a provider who can help.
- **Reaching out to a faith leader.** If you have a faith or spiritual leader, they can also help connect you to local mental health resources in your community.

**If you're in an emergency situation related to your mental health or feel like you are a threat to yourself or others, head to your local hospital emergency room or dial 911 for help.**

## CAREGIVER SPOTLIGHT

**Are you a family caregiver?** While caregiving is rewarding in so many ways, it can also be an isolating experience, impacting social and emotional wellness. Staying connected to others positively impacts well-being, especially during difficult times. The Eldercare Locator can also connect you to family caregiver support programs, which are another way to connect with others, including caregivers who are facing similar issues.



## Resources

### Finding Resources and Support

Many Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) offer friendly caller or telephone reassurance programs where AAA staff and volunteers make regular phone calls to older adults in the community. Some AAAs have pen pal programs that pair older adults with students and volunteers to build new friendships through letter writing. AAAs also offer nutrition services, including meals served in group settings such as senior centers or faith-based locations. Participating in these activities is a win-win: you can receive a healthy meal and connect with others.

To get connected to the AAA in your area, visit the Eldercare Locator at [eldercare.acl.gov](https://eldercare.acl.gov) or call (800) 677-1116.

You can also contact the Institute on Aging's Friendship Line at (800) 971-0016 or the AARP Friendly Voice call line, (888) 281-0145 (English) or (888) 497-4108 (Spanish), to speak with trained volunteers who can lend a friendly ear.

If you or someone you know needs emotional support or is experiencing suicidal thoughts, call the 24/7 **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** at 988 or visit [www.988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org). For those with a mental health or substance abuse concern, contact the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** national helpline at (800) 662-HELP (4357) to connect with a trained counselor. The **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) HelpLine** at (800) 950-NAMI (6264) is staffed by volunteers who will answer questions, offer support and provide next steps.



## Published By

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### **engAGED: The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults** [engagingolderadults.org](http://engagingolderadults.org)

engAGED: The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults is a national effort to increase the social engagement of older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers by expanding and enhancing the Aging Network's capacity to offer social engagement. engAGED is funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living, administered by USAging and guided by a Project Advisory Committee with representatives from national organizations and resource centers.

The logo for engAGED features the word "engAGED" in a purple, sans-serif font. The "e" is lowercase and the "AGED" is uppercase. A green swoosh underline is positioned beneath the "eng" portion of the text.

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### **Eldercare Locator** **(800) 677-1116 (Monday–Friday, 9:00 am–8:00 pm ET)** [eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov)

Launched in 1992, the Eldercare Locator is the only national information and referral resource to provide support to consumers across the spectrum of issues affecting older Americans. The Locator was established and is funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living and is administered by USAging.



Connecting You to Community Services

### **USAging** [usaging.org](http://usaging.org)

USAging is the national association representing and supporting the network of Area Agencies on Aging and advocating for the Title VI Native American Aging Programs. Our members help older adults and people with disabilities throughout the United States live with optimal health, well-being, independence and dignity in their homes and communities.

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Leaders in Aging Well at Home

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