

Combat Loneliness in Elders

Create a family contact plan

Contact plans aren't just for emergencies anymore. Caregivers who care for the elderly in senior assisted living facilities or elderly home care scenarios should be aware of the tools and gadgets available today to help connect elders with other family members. Combat loneliness and depression with 21st century tools and technology.

Dangers of loneliness

Loneliness is a serious issue among seniors. The U.S. Census Bureau's latest statistics mention that nearly 10 million elderly Americans over the age of 65 live alone. The census also revealed that a lone person inhabits nearly one out of every four households in the country. In addition, the American Sociological Review released report findings that average Americans rely on only two friends with whom they feel comfortable confiding in or discussing serious issues. The National Institute of Mental Health noted that in 2004, nearly 16% of suicide deaths were individuals over 65 years of age.

Family contact plans are a great way to communicate with elderly family members whether you live around the corner or several states away. Loneliness, boredom and lack of self-confidence or self-worth lead many seniors to contemplate suicide, especially males over the age of 65. Liz Drew, national executive director of Little Brothers – Friends of the Elderly, says, "People that lack a solid social network of family and friends, or who have few social skills to develop relationships, are more likely to experience loneliness and in turn isolation." However, thanks to modern technological developments, there are ways to combat not only loneliness, but also isolation for the elderly.

The benefits of virtual technology

Family contact plans are a great way to communicate with elderly family members, whether you live around the corner or several states away; whether Mom or Dad lives in an assisted living facility or has home health care. Today, technology is developing all kinds of gadgets that make it possible to view, hear and speak to distant family members.

- **Virtual Family Meals** – Through the use of computers, cameras (webcams) and microphones, families scattered across the country can sit down to dinner together. The system sets up an alert whenever a person

sits down to eat. Other family members hooked up to the system receive the alert and are able to sit down in their own kitchens and interact with that person.

- **CEIVA Digital Frame** – Photos anyone? Connect to solitary elders with a digital photo receiver. Hooked up to a traditional phone line via Wi-Fi or broadband connections, CEIVA frames allow individuals to see photos sent from across the street, the country, or even from around the world. Join the plan and receive photos instantly through downloads from camera to frame.
- **Presto Email** – You don't even have to own a computer to enjoy Presto Mail communications. This email-type program allows family members and friends to send photos, "email" letters or reminders to elders who have a Presto Printing Mailbox. Seniors don't have to do anything – just turn the machine on and receive messages. No toll charges, just an existing phone line is all that is necessary for hooking up.

Family contact plans

In addition to technology, family members and friends are encouraged to create family contact plans with a schedule to connect to solitary elders through the use of telephone, in-person visits and traditional mail systems. Such family contact plans ensure that someone, somehow, is making daily contact with Mom or Dad even if that person doesn't live in the area.

Help the elderly combat loneliness. Communicate. Help your aging parents stay connected to the world even if you can't be there for them in person every day. Take advantage of virtual technology and reduce the risk of Mom or Dad succumbing to loneliness or depression. A single message, greeting or phone call a day can make a bigger difference than you think.

Fast Facts

- **Nearly 10 million elderly Americans over the age of 65 live alone. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau)**
- **Average Americans rely on only two friends with whom they feel comfortable confiding in or discussing serious issues. (Source: report in the American Sociological Review)**

- A lone person inhabits nearly one out of four households in the country. (*Source: U.S. Census Bureau*)