It’s been a lonely year for many. We are closer than ever to the end of this pandemic and the time when we can feel more safe and comfortable connecting with others in person. This is so important because we as human beings are hardwired for connection, which is essential to our well-being.

While some things are beginning to feel “normal” again, many aspects of work and home life may never be the same. We still need to take precautions like wearing a mask and social distancing. \* But social distancing doesn’t have to mean not connecting. We can still stay engaged and foster relationships in new and creative ways. Consider these ways to stay safe and connected:

* ***Join a virtual co-working space.*** [Focusmate](https://www.focusmate.com/) offers three free sessions a week. If you work from home, this can offer a sense of connection and the feel of a creative environment.
* ***Schedule regular video calls with loved ones*.** Face-to-face on a screen is the next best thing to in person communication.
* ***Host a virtual book club.*** Pick a book to read together and a date and time to chat about it.
* ***Set up a group text or chat.*** Use your phone’s message app, or another app such as GroupMe, to keep in touch with family members, neighbors, or friends.
* ***Check in on each other.*** Reach out to your older neighbors or loved ones that you haven’t heard from in a while. Give them a call or drop them a note to brighten their day.
* ***Join an online support group.*** Knowing that others are going through similar struggles can help relieve feelings of loneliness. Check out [Mental Health America](https://www.inspire.com/groups/mental-health-america/) or schedule time to “vent” with a trusted friend.
* ***Take it outside!*** Go for a family walk in your neighborhood or meet friends for a socially distanced walk, bike ride, tennis match, or round of golf. Fresh air and movement are great for body and mind.
* ***Exchange healthy recipes.*** Swap your favorites, and maybeeven plan a meal to make at home and enjoy through a virtual dinner party.
* ***Get creative.*** Break out the art supplies with your children or friends (or on your own!) and create cards for family members, friends, and neighbors.
* **Tinker with tools.** Check out [Men’s Shed](https://usmenssheds.org/what-is-mens-shed/). This club provides tools and materials for (mainly) older guys to pursue interests and passions, learn something new, and share skills.

\* For the most up-to-date COVID-19 information, visit [Hennepin County,](https://www.hennepin.us/residents/emergencies/covid-19) [Minnesota Department of Health](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html), or the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html).