

Intergenerational Programs and Physical Distancing: What to do when we can't be together

Introduction

We recognize that this is an extremely challenging time for everyone and appreciate the efforts to support children, youth and older adults across the United States and the world. With everything that has changed in the past few weeks, the importance of intergenerational relationships and the damages of social isolation have not. We are all struggling to make sense of how to continue and expand intergenerational programs when we can't be together in person.

Despite the challenges, it is inspiring to see how the intergenerational community is responding with such passion and creativity to maintain ties across generations. We believe it is more important now than ever as we face this need for physical distancing.

Generations United developed this resource to share ideas and solutions on how intergenerational professionals can adapt programs and activities and create new intergenerational connections during these unprecedented times. This information is changing rapidly. We envision this as a starting point. New information will be posted on our website (www.gu.org/COVID-19); shared via our weekly e-newsletter *Generations This Week* (information on how to subscribe is below); and posted on our social media accounts (Twitter at twitter.com/GensUnited, Facebook at www.facebook.com/generationsunited/ or Instagram at www.instagram.com/gensunited/). We also welcome new content from you. Please email ssteinig@gu.org with your ideas and solutions.



Tips for Intergenerational Programs in the COVID-19 Crisis

We are still learning how best to connect the generations while maintaining physical distancing. As programs are adapting and developing, we plan to share the promising practices emerging from the pandemic. Many of the key elements of high-quality intergenerational programs still hold. Below are some of the simple tips that have surfaced from conversations with practitioners.

Be Creative: Creativity has always been a linchpin of intergenerational programs and now more than ever we need to think creatively on how to build intergenerational relationships. Take inspiration from some of the ideas presented in this resource and think about the many ways the generations can connect. Don't be afraid to try new ideas.

Be Responsive: Programs and activities need to address the interests and needs of participants including their access to technology and digital literacy. While many programs are shifting to online platforms, not all participants are going to be able to access these opportunities or even want to connect online. Try to meet people of all ages where they are and plan engagement activities that fit.

Be Simple: While the need for intergenerational connections is great, it is fine to start small. Connect with your most committed participants and champions of all ages. Find out what they would like to do. Test ideas and activities with small groups or start with neighbors or family members. Learn from these interactions, revise, and then expand slowly.

Be Patient: In these unprecedented times, remember that staff, caregivers, families, and older and younger people may be stressed and overwhelmed. You may not hear back immediately and may have to contact partners multiple times. Many people, programs, and organizations are adjusting to using new technologies or scaling up their technical capacities. Offer support and encouragement to help them engage.

RESOURCE: Using Technology to Connect Generations

Using Technology to Connect Generations - Report is an on-line publication created by Generations United and Penn State University that provides information about ways in which technology can serve as a powerful medium for facilitating intergenerational engagement. The data source for this report is a survey conducted with 46 intergenerational programs with a major technology component.

Using Technology to Connect Generations – Profiles is a companion publication that profiles 46 intergenerational programs that use technology in creative and effective ways to connect the generations.

Download the report and profiles at aese.psu.edu/extension/intergenerational/program-areas/technology

Intergenerational Distance Programs and Activity Ideas

Many intergenerational program models operate from a distance and others are adapting in response to COVID-19. This list of ideas is compiled from what we have learned from intergenerational practitioners and media stories during the COVID-19 crisis. Many are looking at ways to use technology to connect the generations while others are exploring low-tech solutions. This list is not comprehensive, and things are changing rapidly. We apologize if any of this information has changed. We hope this can serve as an inspiration and a starting point for ways you can connect the generations when we can't be together.

Writing Letters, Creating Art, Sending Videos:

Intergenerational programs have a long history of incorporating letter writing, art, and video in their activities. We have seen a renewed interest in Pen Pal programs using mail and email. We have also learned of programs that are making videos where children and youth are sharing greetings, words of encouragement or songs with their adult friends.

Jodi Schumann from **Ebenezer Ridges**, a shared site in Burnsville, Minnesota, shared that the children in their child care center were creating special projects that the activity directors deliver to the residents.

Kind2Kupuna is a project of Age-Friendly Honolulu in Hawaii that is collecting hopeful messages and pictures from keiki (elementary, middle and high school students) for kupuna (older adults). So far, these messages and drawings have been made into collages and distributed to kupuna in several assisted living communities, senior centers, and kupuna meal providers. To learn more visit, agefriendlyhonolulu.com/youth-initiative/.

Timeslips based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin is sharing several ways to promote creativity and to connect from a distance. They have shared window mural templates and coloring pages to bring a little beauty to someone's day at www.timeslips.org/about/news/32. This is just one of the fun, interactive ways Timeslips is encouraging and supporting people to be creative together while still observing the physical distancing rules of quarantine. You can find more information at www.timeslips.org.

Sharing Smiles, an initiative of Empowering the Ages, connects adults to youth around the country through two different programs – one connecting groups of adults and youth and the other connecting individuals. With each program, people can find pen pals, write joint stories, create poetry, share artwork, inspire with motivational quotes, and creatively share our strengths. You can sign up a group or individual and learn more about their other virtual intergenerational programs at their website www.empoweringtheages.org.

Photography and Memory is a project at the University of Denver with support from LinkAGES Colorado (<https://www.facebook.com/linkagescolorado/>) that creates community through intergenerational conversations around treasured photographs. The program pairs

undergraduate photography students with older adults and moved to an online community. Students communicate with their partners via video conferences, texts, emails, and/or phone calls.

You could also record older adults **reading** stories and share with the children who can't be together right now or create a **virtual book club** where members of different generations read the same book at home and connect via supervised email or chat to discuss what they read.

Helping Another Generation:

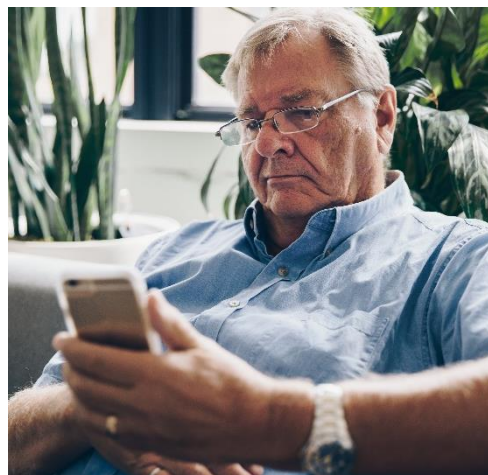
There are several examples of younger people stepping up to do grocery shopping and run other errands for older adults. Generations United has shared a number of these inspiring stories via social media. We will continue to share stories as we learn more. Many programs are connecting with their clients, participants, and volunteers of all ages via phone, email or text. Older adults are also continuing to support children and youth during the pandemic.

Sweet Readers Connect matches youth (ages 11 to 22) with older adults for 15- or 30-minute visits through FaceTime, Zoom, and WhatsApp. Together they share stories, favorite music, create collaborative poetry and more. All youth are trained and supported by Sweet Readers staff. To learn more visit connect.sweetreaders.org.

DreamCatchers' Kindness & Compassion initiative is encouraging youth (and all volunteers) to continue thinking of older adults during this isolating time and sign up to be part of either of their two virtual/tech-based programs. More information at www.dreamcatchers1.org/kindness-compassion-initiative/.

Invisible Hands is a project that started in New York City in response to the COVID-19 crisis. It is a group of engaged volunteers from communities at the least risk for severe COVID-19 reactions working to bring groceries and supplies to those in high-risk demographics. They are focused most prominently on frail older adults, persons with disabilities, and individuals who are immunocompromised, but they are available to help anyone in need. They are, currently serving in the greater New York area and parts of New Jersey. Move information at www.invisiblehandsdeliver.com/.

DOROT in New York City has modified its programs to ensure older adults stay socially connected, maintain



access to critical services and support, and do not experience further isolation. They launched a Caring Calls program where all their older adults receive weekly check-in calls by a volunteer. They have expanded their teleconference programs and support groups and are actively reaching out to add participants. They have also pivoted programs to meet increased demand, added Zoom programming to replace onsite and community programs and their social work support team is available to answer questions and assist with emergency food, food delivery, and other essential items. More information is available at www.dorotusa.org.

Mon Ami is supporting older adults who are isolated by COVID-19 by offering virtual visits at home, tech help over the phone, and contactless errand support. They have set up a Volunteer Phone Bank to connect older adults with calls by phone or video either daily, weekly, or somewhere in between. This free service is now available nationwide. To learn more or sign up, visit app.monami.io/phone-bank/welcome.

Older adults may need help with yard work or outside home maintenance. It's a great opportunity for kids who may be out of school or remote learning and adults working from home to help their neighbors. Stick a note on their door asking if you can help or post a notice on Nextdoor or Neighborhood Group that you are willing to help.

But older neighbors may not need assistance and are just as likely to want to help and connect with children, youth, and families in their neighborhoods. See if they could help students with schoolwork or music lessons or decorate their front windows or porches to entertain and encourage younger children on walks.

This could also be an opportunity for families and friends to tackle projects you never have the time for like working on the family tree, learning family recipes, creating a family cookbook, or digitizing family photos.

Tutoring and Mentoring:

Some **tutoring and mentoring** programs are using different virtual platforms with their established volunteer mentor and tutors. While some are using programs like Zoom, Skype or FaceTime, others are connecting via the phone.

Many **Senior Corps** volunteers are continuing to support children in their community. Jan Newsome from Senior Corps shared that Foster Grandparent Phil Murphy has been listening and following along with his middle school students' math lessons on Google Classroom so he can be ready to assist students who need extra support. More information at www.nationalservice.gov/programs/senior-corps.

MENTOR has tips and resources for mentoring while being separated by COVID-19 including a virtual mentoring portal, tips for text-based communications, and e-mentoring guides all available at www.mentoring.org/coronavirus-resources/.



Digital Storytelling and Oral History:

We have heard plans for conducting digital storytelling and oral histories via FaceTime, Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom or the telephone. This is an opportunity to capture the stories and experiences of people of all ages during the pandemic.

StoryCorps Connect is a new platform developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, that enables you to record a StoryCorps interview with a loved one remotely using video conference technology. The audio and a still photo from each interview are included in the StoryCorps archive at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. More information and access to the platform is available at storycorps.org/participate/storycorps-connect/.

Sages of the Ages: Stories that Touch and Teach is a storytelling program out of the University of Maryland that gathers and shares stories of resiliency. More information, including their curriculum and resources, are available at sph.umd.edu/department/fmsc/sages.

In Ypsilanti, Michigan Generations United is developing a partnership with the Ypsilanti Senior Center and Eastern Michigan University to do a storytelling project over Zoom, Facetime or the phone on the theme of “living through... loneliness, national emergencies, or tough times” with the hope of adopting the stories into a theatre piece.

Online Gatherings and Activities:

There are many opportunities for online gatherings and activities. The following is just a sampling of some of the opportunities and resources we have heard of but there are many more.

- **Kairos Alive** is hosting online intergenerational dance parties via Facebook Live. They are hosting special events and the Daily Swing™ a 10-minute dance party Monday through Friday at 3 pm Central Time. Visit www.facebook.com/kairosdancetheatre/ to participate or see recordings.



- **Silver Kite** is offering Online intergenerational Classes and Events on topics like drawing, painting, dance, improv theatre, storytelling, memoir writing. The classes have a small fee of \$10 – they are also hosting free social hours. More information at www.silverkite.us.
- **Senior Planet** has moved all their programs online and is offering numerous free virtual events – Lunch and Learn, Explore Tech Classes, Show and Tell with Your Pet, Best Video Games for Older Adults and Talent Show. They also have a “stuck at home guide” that includes several online resources for accessing entertainment and education (movies, books, museums) and services (groceries, prescriptions, meditation). Senior Planet also has resources on how to use Zoom and many other tech classes. Learn more at www.seniorplanet.org.
- **Bridges Together** is sharing ideas and resources for connecting at a distance. They have a guide to celebrating holidays from a distance that is available at www.bridgestogether.org/
- Be sure to check out the resources available at **your local public library**. In addition to numerous virtual services and resources, the **Denver Public Library** launched its LitLine service where people can access stories in English or Spanish over the phone. Stories are read by library staff and are updated weekly. The library also hosts daily on-line storytimes on their YouTube page. More information at www.denverlibrary.org/.
- The **Oasis National Network** is offering remote programs and services. You can find more information at www.oasisnet.org/locations/ and click on your local center’s link.
- **DOROT University Without Walls** program offers 100s of classes available over the telephone on a wide range of topics of interest to older adults. Their catalog of courses is available on their website at www.dorotusa.org.
- Many organizations are supporting **virtual volunteering** and volunteering from home. Check out the following groups for ideas and opportunities
 - VolunteerMatch at www.volunteermatch.org

- All For Good from the Points of Light Foundation at www.allforgood.org/
 - AARP’s Create the Good at createthegood.aarp.org/
 - Youth Service America has project ideas for youth that can be done from home at <https://leadasap.ysa.org/ideas/#rating=4>
 - #DoGoodFromHome Challenge is calling on kids and teens to do acts of good from their home with ideas on their website at www.dogoodfromhome.com/
- **Online platforms:** There are a growing number of apps that facilitate connections between families and trusted friends. The following are just a few of the apps we’ve recently learned about.
 - **Caribu** is an app that lets kids up to age 7 have engaging reading experiences with grandparents and trusted friends who can't be in the room with them. It also offers games, activities and coloring sheets, in eight languages. The startup recently made the app free during the COVID-19 pandemic at <https://caribu.com/>
 - **Uchi**, which means “inner circle” in Japanese, is a free app that helps people authentically connect with those who matter most to them. The app offers thought-provoking questions that encourage conversations across generations at <https://uchiconnection.com/>.
 - **The Family Room** is an app that connects families when they can’t be together to play, read, watch, and do homework together at <http://thefamilyroom.biz/>

Troubleshooting Technology

We know that access to technology is a significant barrier for many people of all ages – both connecting to the internet, having the appropriate electronic device, and knowing how to use it.

Access to Internet: Senior Planet is maintaining up-to-date information on low-cost and free internet access seniorplanet.org/stuck-at-home-guide-get-online/

Access to Electronic Devices: Senior Planet also has a list of recommended and low-cost devices seniorplanet.org/best-devices/

There are ways to get low-cost and sometimes free electronics. Many local governments have programs to refurbish and distribute computers to their residents. Also, there are non-profits like PCs for People that sell and donate refurbished computers and other electronics www.pcsforpeople.org/eligibility/ and Freegeek.org which sells refurbished computers from their online store at www.ebay.com/str/freegeekbasicsstore. Manufacturers like Samsung, Apple, and Microsoft sell refurbished devices.

Mutual aid networks and groups are another source for assistance or finding free or low-cost devices. You can find mutual-aid groups in your community at www.mutualaidhub.org/

Digital Literacy: There are many resources to help older adults learn to use the internet. Many of the programs and resources listed in the previous sections provide classes and tutoring on using technology. Here are just a few examples:

- **Senior Planet** offers a wide range of online trainings and assistance for adults 60+ on a wide range of technology topics. You can access their content at www.seniorplanet.org. They have also launched the National Senior Planet Hotline (920-666-1959) to answer questions over the phone. The Hotline is open 9 am – 5 pm EDT, Monday – Friday.
- **Cyber-Seniors** offers on-line tech sessions and a program for youth to become tech mentors. Information is available at cyberseniors.org/. You can also call them at 844-217-3057.
- **OASIS** offers a wide range of tools and support for using technology. More information is available at connections.oasisnet.org/

Online Safety: Online safety is an important consideration for intergenerational programs connecting via technology. Many of the providers listed above have classes and resources on staying safe while online. Additionally, UNICEF has put together a resource for keeping children safe at www.unicef.org/coronavirus/keep-your-child-safe-online-at-home-covid-19 and AARP has a list of steps for adults to stay safe online at www.aarp.org/home-family/personal-technology/info-2019/privacy-for-seniors.html.

Learn More & Stay Connected

Generations United is committed to helping connect the intergenerational field. The intergenerational community is always willing to share successes and challenges. Generations United is committed to trying our best to facilitate those connections. The following are some of Generations United’s activities to connect practitioners in response to the current COVID-19 crisis:

Generations This Week: We will continue to issue our weekly e-newsletter, *Generations This Week* (GTW), where we share program ideas, resources, news, and funding announcements for the intergenerational field. You can sign up by visiting our website- www.gu.org- and clicking on the Get Involved button on the top right.

COVID-19 Resources: We created a landing page on Generations United’s website to share responses and resources related to COVID-19. This page includes resources specifically for grandfamilies or families in which grandparents and other relatives are raising children.

Zoom Conversations: Generations United is co-hosting gatherings with Encore.org via Zoom where we can share what we learn about intergenerational programs, hear presentations about different models of distance programs, and facilitate small breakouts. Recordings of past conversations and handouts are available at www.gu.org/COVID-19. Future meetings will be announced in GTW.

Intergenerational Connections Facebook Group: Generations United hosts the Intergenerational Connections group on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/intergenerational/. Anyone interested in learning and sharing about intergenerational programs is invited to join. If you're active on Facebook, please join this group and engage with your peers there- whether it's posing questions, sharing your program ideas, or finding local connections in the field

We know that not everyone uses Facebook and are happy to explore other options. Please contact Generations United staff if you would like for us to look at networking on other social networks or platforms.

Resources: Many organizations are providing tools and resources for professionals, families, caregivers, and older and younger people during the COVID-19 crisis. The following are just a small sample:

- **ZERO TO THREE** has resources for professionals and families at www.zerotothree.org.
- **Child Care Aware of America** has resources for child care providers and families at www.childcareaware.org/coronavirus-landing-page/.
- **Children's Defense Fund** is sharing useful resources for children and families at www.childrensdefense.org/.
- **Youth Service America** has collected a wide variety of resources for youth and those working with youth at www.ysa.org.
- **Youth Engaged 4 Change** has resources to help young people make choices about how to help themselves and others engage.youth.gov/topics/covid-19.
- **National Council on Aging** has resources for older adults, caregivers, and professions at www.ncoa.org/.
- **LeadingAge** has guidance, tools, and resources for aging services providers across the continuum of care at leadingage.org/.
- **211** is a comprehensive source of local social service information in the U.S. and Canada. More information at www.211.org.

Conclusion

Thank you to all the people who have shared how they are adapting their programs and their ideas for ways to strengthen intergenerational connections during this unprecedented time. Please keep sharing what you are doing, ideas you would like to try, challenges you are facing, and anything else on your mind with Sheri Steinig at ssteinig@gu.org.

Much of the work that we do is supported by our members and donors. We hope you will consider joining Generations United. You can find information at www.gu.org/get-involved

We know this a very challenging time for all of us and we are grateful for all you do to support children, youth and older adults in your communities. Also, know that we at Generations United are here to support you. We look forward to connecting with you. Be well.