

Love and care, long distance



Even as we return to activities with family and friends, lessons we learned during the pandemic can help keep us connected with people we don't see often. We should take what we've learned about congregating digitally – you're a pro with Zoom, right? – improve upon it and keep using our imaginations. Since we may not always be able to cradle our grandchild or cheer our best friend's latest achievement, we can find more meaningful ways to remove the longing from long-distance relationships.

THE SOUL IN OUR FOOD

In cultures where seasoned cookware is an heirloom, recipes always have a special ingredient and the kitchen is the spiritual centre of the family. While nothing can quite replace a good meal shared in great company, we can share a favourite family recipe – and the experience of cooking together. Invite someone to a co-cooking “class” by sharing a recipe and shopping list in the invitation. Then use a video app to cook together in real time, sharing pointers and poignant anecdotes that go along with the meal. By the end, you’ll see the secret to the dish isn’t in the sauce – but you knew that already.

LITTLE SHARED CONFIDENCES

Planned conversations and the expectations that come with them can be difficult for anyone, especially children. Changing the pace and the content can go a long way toward engaging young ones more meaningfully. Apps like

Marco Polo allow you to send a short video message that the recipient can watch any time. Rather than asking about school, use the video chat to share an unusual bug you found on your walk, or your cat’s strange shenanigans. It’s like a treasure-filled show-and-tell. By presenting our random musings whenever we think of someone, we share a more visceral look into the details of our daily lives. In return, the call-and-response format allows loved ones of any age to reply with spontaneity and creativity.

REDISCOVER CLASSIC PARTY GAMES

Fits of giggles are the mark of a good party game – whether the party is in the same room or from different countries. Pictionary remains a classic for a reason, using websites like Scribbbl or screen-sharing via Zoom spares us the need to find a big easel. There are a variety of setup guides online. Even simpler: trivia games, charades, two truths and a lie – the list of games is extensive.

GOING ANALOG

Sometimes, tangible is just the ticket. Try sending matching mugs, cookies and tea sachets ahead of a video or phone conversation – the similarity in tastes, sights and smells may enhance the feeling of togetherness. Bonus: anti-anxiety GABA neurotransmitters release while consuming hot liquids. Or you could take technology out of the mix altogether and write a letter. The elegance and emotion imbued in the handwritten message has only been enhanced with the adoption of instant communication. If you’re not feeling very wordy, an old-school care package can speak volumes without a sense of obligation to reciprocate.

THE MEDIUM ISN’T THE MESSAGE

Whether its food, frolic or fun, the possibilities for reaching out to someone are endless. The lesson we’re learning is that video chat really is an incredible achievement, and that we can appreciate it without allowing it to drain all the colour and variety from our relationships. With a little imagination and patience, love will find its way. But that has always been true.

