

Research after the SARS pandemic in Hong Kong in 2008, provides evidence of the significance of connection through epidemics.  It found that residents in Hong Kong experienced increased social connectedness, which offset the negative mental health impacts of the pandemic.

As connection is so important during this time, here are some tips on staying connected to others during this time. Remember – we are all in this together. This is unpleasant, but it will pass

* Remind yourself that this is a temporary period of isolation to slow the spread of the virus.
* Stay connected with friends, family and colleagues via email, social media, video conferencing or telephone.
* Keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy foods.
* Establish routines as best as possible and try to view this period as a new experience that can bring health benefits. Create a routine that prioritises things you enjoy and even things you have been meaning to do but haven’t had enough time. Read that book, watch that show, take up that new hobby.
* Set up a ‘gratitude tree’ by creating a group using text, email or a messaging app such as WhatsApp, then have all the group members post a message or send a text to other members to share something they are grateful for. Do it every day to keep your spirits up.



*Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people!’*

*(Luke 5:10b)*

* Set challenges with a friend or group of friends that you’re in digital contact with (a new, healthy habit, hobby or simply something a bit silly like daring each other to wear something you haven’t pulled out of the closet in years), then check in daily with each other to ensure you stay motivated.
* Make a date to watch the same TV show, movies or Netflix show with someone and message each other your thoughts along the way… like *Goggle Box*but on separate couches.
* Understand history. Events like infectious diseases often follow a predictable course. In the past 50 years there have been multiple national and international episodes of concern around conditions such as tuberculosis, SARS, Ebola, HIV, hepatitis, measles, to name a few. Initially, there is often scepticism, followed by attention, followed by panic, followed by reality, followed by a return to normality. Stock markets and supermarket shelves are good indicators of where we are in the course. Reminding yourself of these patterns can help you to understand the course and plan for the future.
* Shut down the noise. Stress is infectious, and often unhelpful. People tend to talk about things they are worried about; this create lots of ‘noise’, which can create even more stress. Give yourself permission to switch off ‘noise’ such as social media, news, or even radio for most of each day. Also give yourself permission to excuse yourself from people who are creating stress. Keep checking in to reliable news sources once or twice a day, but otherwise, turn down the 'noise'. Instead, replace it with things that can help you, including doing things you enjoy, listening to music, entertainment, games, or even meditation.
* Keep healthy routines. We all have routines in our daily lives. Our emotional health is strongly affected by regular routines. Spend some time thinking about the routines that are important to you and those around you, and find clever and safe ways to keep up these routines or create new ones.



*When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.(Psalm 94:19).*

* Follow a “calm yet cautious” approach **–**do your best to remain calm and be mindful not to contribute to the widespread panic that can hinder efforts to positively manage the outbreak. Ensure you are following directives issued by the government, medical advice and observe good hygiene habits.
* Show compassion and kindness to one another –these times of fear, isolation (both physical and social) and uncertainty are when it is most important that we strengthen our sense of community by connecting with and supporting each other.
* Be generous to others – giving to others in times of need not only helps the recipient, it enhances your wellbeing too. Is there a way to help others around you?
* Until this distressing, and for some devastating, storm passes, block out times each week where coronavirus is not allowed to be mentioned. In fact, why not have a ‘covid jar’ where you have to put money in every time you mention it during your ‘block out’ and then, depending on how bad you are at keeping the pact, you may have enough funds to go on a trip once it’s over — or if money is tight, you could put ‘chore IOUs’ in there for the person you’re vowing with?

*What can we talk about other than the dreaded coronavirus?*

* share your favourite recipes
* classic ‘must read’ trilogies or series and why
* suggestions for dinner party games that don’t involve tech
* how to grow your own veggie garden
* if supermarkets no longer existed, what strategy would you and your family/friends put in place to be self-sufficient
* what area would you choose to upskill or learn a new skill?
* if you already know a second language, teach others
* discuss the best sitcom of all time — everyone in your group has to watch the episode you recommend before a follow up discussion
* the trips you’re most looking forward to when we can travel again — local, national or international
* what fitness, entertainment or skilled class would you like to run online and how would you do it
* back to basics: what are you cooking for dinner? What’s the most creative/delicious thing you can make with tinned food
* talk about nature and gardening: how beautiful the sunset is tonight or how your plants are going — what’s your secret to keeping things alive?
* what audible books are you listening to and what are you learning?
* come up with a list of inspirational quotes so you can you set up on a board that sits outside or on your windowsill for passers-by or to post one on your socials each day
* what are things you can’t have right now that, in the absence of them, make you realise you don’t need them?
* video call coffee catchups with friends

*Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always (Robin Williams)*