

# Intergenerational living during COVID-19

## What older adults need to know



Staying close to family can be important for our mental and physical health in later life.<sup>1</sup> However, it can be challenging to live with loved ones, especially when there are generational differences. Sometimes, this can cause more stress than comfort. Below are a number of strategies to help you strengthen your relationships and manage conflict.

- **Recognize and respect your differences**

Your loved ones' lifestyle choices, communication styles, financial habits, and beliefs may be different than yours.<sup>2</sup> It is important to recognize and respect that they have the right to their own feelings, opinions and choices.<sup>3</sup> You can strengthen your relationship by taking the time to understand each other's point of view. Start with a simple, respectful conversation.<sup>4</sup>

- **Make space for open communication**

This requires active listening. Focus on what the other person is saying and listen in a non-judgemental way.<sup>3</sup> Speak openly and truthfully, and ask for clarity when it's needed. Repeat back what you heard to ensure you understand what the other person is trying to say. Be open to change and willing to compromise to find solutions on which everyone can agree.<sup>3</sup>

- **Learn from each other**

As we get older, our family roles may change.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, everyone has something to offer.<sup>5</sup> Share some of your knowledge with your loved ones, and let them teach you something new. For example, you can teach your grandchildren how to cook one of your favourite recipes. Or, you can ask them to teach you how to take a picture on your phone. You can also exchange letters with your family members to show your gratitude for one another.<sup>6</sup>

- **Keep it positive**

Show your appreciation for your loved ones.<sup>7</sup> If there is a conflict, talk through the problem. If the conversation becomes heated, you can take a step back and return to it after taking time for reflection.<sup>8</sup> Time-outs and cooling-off periods are good solutions when emotions become intense.

- **Connect with people outside of your home**

Staying connected to friends outside of your home, or making new connections, can also be healthy for your relationships at home.<sup>8</sup> Some of the many ways you can stay connected with others include joining an online workshop and calling a friend.

- **Set boundaries and try to self-regulate.**

Healthy boundaries are limits we set based on our beliefs and needs. We can choose how to respond when someone crosses those limits. We can set and communicate physical, emotional, mental and material boundaries. For example, you can answer:

- Who is allowed in your physical space?
- Are you being non-judgemental about your emotions?
- How are your financial decisions being made?

## Resources

- **Community Information Centres ([www.211Ontario.ca](http://www.211Ontario.ca) or Dial 211)**
  - 211 connects people to the right information and to different health and social services in communities across Ontario.
- **ConnexOntario (1-866-531-2600 or [www.connexontario.ca](http://www.connexontario.ca))**
  - ConnexOntario is an information line to learn about mental health and addiction services in Ontario. It is free, confidential and open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- **Seniors Safety Line (SSL) (1-866-299-1011)**
  - The SSL provides information on agencies in Ontario that can assist in cases of elder abuse. They have trained counsellors who can provide safety planning and support for older adults who are being abused or at-risk of abuse. It is free, confidential and open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## References

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