

Stay Connected From Any Distance

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Written by Megan Bruckschen, *Felician Village at Home* Membership Manager

That's the physical distance between my front porch and my mom's driveway. Thankfully, she's an active sixty-one year old (she's given me approval to tell everyone that) who is fairly technologically savvy, and also has my stepdad, who is nine years younger than her, for support. Regardless of her age and physical condition, it's still hard to be that far apart on a daily basis. Like myself, many adult children are challenged with the inability to be physically present on a daily basis, but provide care and support to their aging parents. COVID-19 swept in quickly this March, halting many adult children from visiting their parents, even if they only live a few blocks or miles away.

While I am not an expert on this, I hope to offer my thoughts on staying connected and helping from a distance:

- **Technology-** We regularly use FaceTime, Facebook Messenger Video and our Amazon Echo Show to video chat. It makes a huge difference when you can visually see someone's face, their weather, house, or in my mom's case – her cats. You will need home internet access, a public Wi-Fi connection or a cellular data plan to use these options. It's ok if your loved one doesn't feel comfortable using that technology now. Spend some time researching what device will work best to keep them connected. As a *Felician Village at Home* member, we offer monthly technology tutoring sessions that can help people become more comfortable using their devices and programs.
- **Snail mail** – I will be the first to admit, I'm not great at this. I have good intentions and buy cards and stamps, and sometimes they never get put in the mailbox. Getting my children involved in snail mail for my mom and grandma has helped hold me accountable for mailing cards and letters, as well as giving my children an opportunity to practice their penmanship with a non-screen activity.
- **Plan a visit** – For me, this is the most exciting part. I look forward to visits with my family, some in our respective homes, but our intergenerational family vacations are by far my favorite. My mom has been present with us for memories that make the burden of living far away more tolerable. She's been there to see her grandchildren's first splashes in the ocean, she rode every ride they did at Disney World with them (often times enjoying it more than the kids), and we all were able to witness the beauty of the Grand Canyon together. Travel agents can make these trips simple and easy for groups departing from varying locations. The memories we've made together, no matter where we are, are priceless and carry me through until we see each other again.
- **Family Meetings** – I cannot stress this enough, COMMUNICATE. Bring others in to the conversation. Write things down to recap what is said verbally and follow up with a written note or email. Technology is a wonderful thing, but I believe it can also lead to



the breakdown of communication, just as easily as it can help. Don't be afraid to set weekly or monthly meetings with your family (parents, siblings, etc.).

- **Seek out help** – It's ok to admit you can't be there to do everything. In my case, I grew up where my mom lives and have classmates that are now professionals in a wide variety of industries. Network with people you already know and trust, look for reputable service providers, and reach out to community organizations to do the things you can't. Continued communication with your parent on what you can and can't do from afar will help. Reiterate that if they have someone, or an organization, coming into their home you should know about it. Unfortunately, there are people and/or companies that prey on older adults who feel they don't have another option for assistance.
- **Talk about the future** – It's never too early to start talking about future levels of care with your family members. We start financially preparing for retirement in our 20's, but in some cases families wait to talk about healthcare or living arrangements until something bad happens. My personal and professional experience has allowed me to see the value in talking about what to do next. I don't want to wait until something happens to mom and I am forced into making a quick decision. Many community organizations offer educational sessions about a variety of topics around aging. Watch social media or traditional media options for these events and start adding them to your calendar today.

I'd love to hear from you if you have navigated through this challenge in life! I'll update this blog with other ideas and thoughts from people as I hear from them.

mbruckschen@felicianvillage.org

Distance means so little when someone means so much. Blessings to you and your family!