Using Technology to Meet the Needs of Older Adults Isolated at Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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http://digitalpeersupport.org/
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Disclosures

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Agenda

1. Technologies for older adults

1. Older adult technology preferences

1. Normal aging and technology

1. Addressing loneliness and social isolation
Who Are Older Adults?

- Sense of independence
- Sense of purpose
- Friendship/family/friends
- Dignity
- Sense of Belonging
- Higher frequency and severity of major life events
Technologies for Older Adults

- Digital technologies help deliver, engage, manage, and enhance communication, learning, and services
- Digital technology has transformed how people engage, provide services, and communicate with older adults, caregivers, families, groups, organizations, and communities

How Technology Can Help Older Adults

- Loneliness
- Hope
- Empowerment
- Wellbeing
- Quality of life

Emerging Technologies

- Five emerging technologies for older adults are:
  - Sensors
  - Wearables
  - Robots
  - Telepresence
  - Smartphone apps
  - Social media
  - Video games

Myth #1: Older Adults Don’t Use Social Media

- 55% of people ages 61 and older use social media.
- Older adults are most active on Facebook compared to other social media platforms, and a majority report using the platform at least once a week.
- 4% of older adults are on Twitter
Myth #2: Older Adults Aren’t Gamers

- 32% of adults aged 61 and older play games
- 32% of adults younger than 60 years old play games
Myth #3: Older Adults Don’t Own A Smartphone

- 84% of older adults own a smartphone
- 90% of older adults use it at least once a day.

Porter Novelli Styles
Five emerging technologies for older adults are:

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Selecting Peer Support Apps

**Step #1:** Our co-production team searches the App Store and Google Play weekly for “Peer Support”.

**Step #2:** Next, we screen for peer support specialists’ digital technology standards, such as 508 compliance, recovery language and principles, features to allow for communication between peers, inclusion peer-supported evidence-based practices, peer developed or co-produced with allies.

**Step #3:** Peer support apps that meet peer support specialists’ digital technology standards are included into our database.

**Step #4:** Peer support specialists’ and service users’ assess the value or quality of peer support apps based on their personal experience with the app.
Access to Technology

- Preference matters
- Dial “211”
- Safelink
- Assurance
- St. Vincent de Paul
- Salvation Army
- States are providing free phones and/or video conferencing software
- [State Assistive Technology Act Program](#)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the mission of the program?</td>
<td>The mission of the AT Act program is to serve people with all types of disabilities, of all ages, in all environments, and provide an array of services to meet AT needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the goals for the program?</td>
<td>The overall goal of the AT Act is to increase access to and acquisition of AT devices and services through comprehensive state level and state leadership activities.</td>
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AT Act Programs Overview

56 State AT Act Programs

- State Level Activities:
  - Device Demonstration
  - Device Loan
  - Reutilization (Reuse)
  - State Financing

- State Leadership Activities:
  - Information & Assistance
  - Training and Technical Assistance (includes Information Communication Technology Accessibility and Transition)
  - Public Awareness
Program Directory: Find your State Program:

https://www.at3center.net/stateprogram
Myth #4: You Can’t Teach an Old Dog New Tricks

- Older adults can learn skills in late life, although learning some skills may take longer than in younger adults.

Porter Novelli Styles
Learning How To Use Technology

- A study of a peer tutor model designed to teach older adults about information and communications technologies found that participants reported a significant and consistent increase in their confidence about completing computer-related tasks and using technology tools such as e-mail, the Internet, and online chat rooms (Woodward et al., 2012).
A study of older adult peer support specialists’ text message exchanges with older adults found that participants reported using technology to simultaneously manage mental health and physical health issues; (2) realizing new capabilities in late-life; (3) sharing their roles as parents and grandparents; (4) wisdom; and (5) sharing lived experience of with normal age-related changes (emerging).

Learning How To Use Technology

- Older adults may have had negative prior experiences with technology or feel that they don’t have the skills to master technology:
  - Keep it relevant and simple
  - Talk slowly
  - Have patience
  - Repeat
  - Hands on practice
  - Encourage people to write down steps
  - Conduct one-on-one using one platform
  - Skepticism about privacy
When Teaching Older Adults About Technology …

• Explain how to do something rather than just doing it

• Use the “I – We – You” method
  • First, the family member or caregiver shows the older adult how to use the technology
  • Then, the family member and older adult do it together, walking through the process again
  • Last, the older adult uses the technology on their own

• Tell them, “First I’m going to demonstrate it, then we’ll do it together, then I’ll ask you to try it on your own.”
Normal Aging and Technology

- Changes in eyesight are a normal part of the aging process. For example, it is normal to...
  - Difficulty focusing one’s vision on objects that are close-up
  - Difficulty distinguishing colors such as blue from black
  - Difficulty seeing where an object ends, and its background begins
  - Need more light to see well
  - Need more time to adjust to different levels of light, such as entering a brightly lit room
  - Become more sensitive to glare
Normal Aging and Technology

Ways to Promote Connectivity

• No “video shaming”
• Communicate with large font (via email, text, etc.)
• Communicate via Skype or Zoom during the day and in a well-lit room
• Not sit too close to the screen during video conferences so people can see your face clearly
• Suggest the use of devices like GrandPad
Normal Aging and Technology

- Hearing loss is also a normal part of the aging process. Age-related hearing loss occurs gradually, usually in both ears. For example, it is normal to have...
  - Difficulty hearing high-pitched sounds, such as a women’s or child’s voice
  - Trouble hearing consonant heavy words
  - Difficulty following conversation in a room with loud background noises
How Can People Connect with People who are Deaf or Have Hearing Loss

- Include captions on videoconferencing
- Useful apps for people who are Deaf or have hearing loss
  - Google Live Transcribe
  - AVA
  - Rogervoice
  - Voxsci
  - TapSOS
  - Braci Sound Alert
  - Signly
Normal Aging and Technology

Ways to Promote Connectivity

• Suggest the use of earplugs when they are around loud machinery or other loud noises

• Include closed captioning in Skype and Zoom meetings

• Conduct phone calls or video meetings in locations with low background noise
Normal Aging and Technology

- Changes in mobility are a normal part of the aging process. For example, as people age their…
  - Bones shrink in size and density, making them at risk of fractures
  - Muscles lose strength, endurance, and flexibility
  - Spinal column becomes curved and flattened
Normal Aging and Technology

Ways to Promote Connectivity

• No “video shaming”

• Take breaks during long phone call or video conferences
Normal Aging and Technology

- Memory
  - Subtle changes in memory occur naturally as part of the aging process.
  - Realizing memory change is a natural part of the aging process helps with self-acceptance and normalization.
Normal Aging and Technology

Ways to Promote Connectivity

• End each meeting with a short summary of the material which was covered and email a summary after a video conference or phone call
  • Include caregiver if informed consent is provided

• Repeat questions or phrases

• Focus on one topic at a time

• Go over information or questions slowly

• Pause between questions

• Suggest the use of a calendar to set reminders, keep track of appointments, and share information with family members and/or friends
Depression and anxiety feed on social isolation and loneliness

• Loneliness is a personal experience, in which a person believes their social connections is not aligned with their need for a sense of belonging (Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999).

• Loneliness is an often unrecognized dimension of health that has serious implications for cardiovascular health and mortality (Ong, Rothstein, & Uchino).
Addressing Loneliness and Social Isolation through Wisdom

1. Raise Your Resilience—gratitude and ageism, and employs value-based activities emphasizing empathy, compassion and self-compassion.
2. Older adult peer support specialists
3. Life review
Addressing Loneliness and Social Isolation

- Stay in touch with loved ones using GrandPad, Facebook Messenger, or WhatsApp
- Assigning a nursing facility staff member as a primary contact for families to facilitate inbound communications as well as outbound
- Fostering partnerships with new entities, such as local police, mail carriers, high school students and school bus drivers to pick up and deliver prescriptions, groceries, and home delivered meals for older adults
- **Know Resources in Your State**
Addressing Loneliness and Social Isolation

• Well Connected by Covia – Connects individuals to virtual classes, conversations, and activities by phone.
  • Programs available in English and Spanish
    • (877) 797-7299 (English)
    • (877) 400-5867 (Spanish)

• Lifetime Connections Without Walls by Family Eldercare - Telephone activities program providing opportunities for older adults to connect with others in their community and across the country using a telephone conference call system.
  • Referral: (888) 500-6472
    lcww@familyeldercare.org
Addressing Loneliness and Social Isolation

- **Friendship Line by Institute on Aging** - The Friendship Line is both a crisis intervention hotline and a warmline for non-emergency emotional support calls.
  - It is a 24-hour tollfree line and the only accredited crisis line in the country for people aged 60 years and older, and adults living with disabilities.
Addressing Loneliness and Social Isolation

- Volunteering
- Listen to free audio books on Audible.
- SAGEConnect - SAGEConnect links LGBT elders with their broader community, reducing isolation and promoting well-being. Interested individuals can register at the link provided or call the registration line at 929-484-4160
Social Determinants of Health

If you need help finding services in your community, the Eldercare Locator can help.

Visit https://eldercare.acl.gov/

call 1-800-677-1116.
Training includes education on older adult mental health, technologies for older adults, trauma-informed digital communication with older adults, older adult technology preferences, normal aging and technology, connecting/bonding virtually, the role of family and caregivers in technology, recognizing signs of abuse/neglect, and addressing loneliness and social isolation.

http://digitalpeersupport.org/certification/

Fortuna, K et al. Strategies to Impact Peer Support Specialists’ Capacity to Use Digital Peer Support Technology. (under review).
Thank You

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