

SOCIAL CLOSENESS WHILE SOCIAL DISTANCING

With the current pandemic and national lockdown we are instructed to observe social distancing. This has become part of our everyday conversations and the new normal - at least for now.

Regardless of whether your friendships are longstanding or new, practicing social distancing can put a strain on any relationship and highlight the weaknesses in even the best of them.

Trying to find your way through this new normal is hard and at times it may feel easier to say that once you can see each other again, you will pick up where you left off. But that is not the point of social distancing.

Social distancing does not have to mean social isolation or disconnection. There are many ways in which you can actually enjoy your friendships more than ever and engage meaningfully, highlighting the strengths in your relationships.

How do we do that if we are being urged to stay away from each other? As social beings, how can we cope?

The answer is that we are only being asked to be physically distant, not emotionally.

Here are some points to consider about how you can remain socially close, or become even closer than before:

1) You may actually have more time to have meaningful conversations with your friends now. Think about the catch-up coffees, dinners, or quick hellos in the school parking lot. Prior to the virus outbreak we were always running and much time could pass without us knowing what was going on in our friends' lives. Now we can take advantage of available time and schedule a weekly calls to really engage with each other and have meaningful catch-up sessions on the phone, zoom or skype.

2) Embrace those friends or acquaintances you haven't seen or spoken to in a while. Life on the run often passed in a blur. Weeks rushed by and before you knew it a month or two had gone without seeing or even speaking to some of your friends. Now that we are being forced to slow down why not consider those friends who may have been neglected. For example, we all have friends living overseas who it is often

difficult to catch up with. Embrace these friendships and connections by starting a new cycle of contact.

3) Assure your friends that their relationships are important to you. We often skip this maintenance behaviour assuming the other person already knows they mean a lot to us. Especially in times of social isolation, assurances are important. Take the time to tell someone you love them, care for them, and that they matter to you. Do not take this for granted.

4) Use a variety of media. Connect via video calling apps for the longer and more intimate catch up sessions you want to have with your friends and use quick messaging for the more frequent check-ins.

But don't use only messaging apps and hope that your friendship will just remain the same.

Considering all the above we all need some tangible suggestions on ways to connect with our friends from afar:

- Schedule a time to watch a movie or TV show together, as you would have previously done by going to the movies, but with a slight difference. Streaming services are releasing movies online so find a movie you and your friend would have chosen to go see, schedule a date and time and watch it together using video calling. Alternatively suggest a TV series or movie to each other, watch, and then discuss it over video calling.
- Make arrangements with another couple that both you and your partner are friendly with. Make dinner and pour some wine, then switch on the video chat to enjoy a meal with another couple, even if you aren't able to go to a restaurant together.
- Start, join, or continue your book club virtually. Invite those that you know may like to join.
- Learn something new together. Perhaps your friend is good at baking and you have always wanted her to teach you. Set up a video call and let your friend teach you some baking.
- Create a group video chat and catch up with your friend group at once. These chats can be hard to manage with so many voices but are fun to coordinate every once in

a while. You could play a game together or take turns sharing your experiences of working from home and keeping the kids entertained.

- Create a Zoom session where you and your friends can do something new, or something that you all used to do together. For example, if you used to play cards with your friends once a week try set this up to take place virtually, or if you and your friends got together once a month to do a Challah bake do this via Zoom.

We are all in this together and experience a wide range of emotions. When you are feeling positive, reach out to a friend or acquaintance and offer them support. Let them know you are thinking of them.

It is imperative to build a foundation of healthy coping, maintaining awareness of the side-effects of our necessary societal changes and staying connected to our values and to each other.

Human beings have great capacity for empathy and caring in times of suffering. Maintaining social distance doesn't need to change that. Rather let the social distancing highlight the strengths and creative ways in which we can connect.

One of the advantages of social distancing is being forced to use our words when physical embraces are not permitted. This is a way in which we can become creative in our connecting. We can learn how to strengthen our communication skills when we have to find words to express ourselves. This is a lesson that couples who observe Taharat Hamishpacha/mikvah have to learn - use your words to meaningfully connect and find ways to embrace emotionally while physical embraces are not permitted. Connecting on such a level brings new dimensions to relationships.

May all your friendships grow and blossom during this time, forming life-long connections that remain strong through all life's challenges.

Give us feedback and share other ways of remaining connected. We would like to hear from you!

