



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA
SANFORD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Supporting Families in the Post-COVID World: Using Technology to Maximize Reach and Remain Connected

Letty Thelen

Autism Family Support Group Coordinator
USD Center for Disabilities (SD UCEDD/SD LEND)

Why Is Family Engagement Important?

- People are more socially isolated than ever before
- Families are struggling with changes to their daily routines.
- People are seeking out opportunities to connect.





UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA
SANFORD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Online Engagement = A Solution!

SOCIAL distancing is really just **PHYSICAL** distancing.

Online is safer and convenient

- ✓ No mask or “social distancing” required
- ✓ Join from the comfort of home (pj’s ok!)

We can still socialize & connect!





UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA
SANFORD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

How To Get Started

Survey to determine interest/preferences

- ✓ What to do, how often, when
- ✓ Doesn't have to be formal – use what you have access to (or free)
 - Send an email with a list of questions
 - Use software like Microsoft Forms or Survey Monkey

Determine registration process

- ✓ Participants email/call to sign up
- ✓ Use software like Eventbrite to help manage registrations and communications to participants





How To Get Started (continued)

Provide information/instructions for successful participation

- ✓ How-to for the tech you're using (Zoom, Adobe Connect, Skype, etc.)
 - Tip sheets or videos (check out Ohio State University Nisonger Center's plain language tips sheets at <https://nisonger.osu.edu/learn-to-zoom/>)
(YouTube for videos or make your own)
- ✓ Opportunities to test tech before the event

Plan to send reminders

- ✓ Eventbrite includes several auto-email reminders
- ✓ *Minimum* of 1 reminder the day before via email
- ✓ Include how-to's for tech, event connection info, contact info for the organizers



How To Get Started (continued)

Market your event

- ✓ Flyers
- ✓ Social Media
- ✓ Email

Host your event *(the fun part!)*

Survey your participants after the event

- ✓ What did they like?
- ✓ What could be improved?
- ✓ Ideas for future events
- ✓ Do they want to hear about upcoming events?



ARE YOU READY?



Event Ideas

Support: Meet one-on-one or in a group setting (similar ages, similar interests, etc.)

Teach: Help others learn a new skill (cooking, arts & crafts projects/tutorials, etc.)

Socialize: Get together and have fun!

- ✓ Game ideas: Scattergories, Bingo, Trivia, Show & Tell, Simon Says, Scavenger Hunt
- ✓ Chatting/meeting with others on a topic of mutual interest (book club, poetry club, video games, music, etc.)
- ✓ Activities that provide an opportunity to “hanging out online” with another person versus doing so alone (exercise/fitness, happy hour, share favorite YouTube videos, make crafts, create art, meditation/self care, cook, meal prep, organize paperwork, endless possibilities!)



Planning Tips

- ✓ Limit meeting times to 90 minutes or less
- ✓ Build in breaks for physical activity (every 20 min)
- ✓ Disable participant annotation & screen sharing
- ✓ Use waiting room (if available)
- ✓ Consider limiting number of participants (4-5)
- ✓ Consider using a waiting list
- ✓ Consider muting participants on entry
- ✓ Make sure forms are fillable on mobile
- ✓ Consider a practice run





Event Tips

- ✓ Two facilitators during the event if possible
 - One in charge of muting/unmuting and watching the chat, the other to lead the activity/keep the event going
 - Chat (be sure to copy/repost pertinent info in the chat box for newcomers)
 - Rename participants (if needed) so that it's easy to see who's talking
- ✓ Login in early to touch base with other facilitators before the event starts
- ✓ Start on time, but stall a little to accommodate latecomers
 - Test audio to make sure sound is working etc.
 - Share screen for everyone to view the activity rules, visuals, etc.
 - Rename participants (if needed) so that it's easier to interact

Event Tips (continued)



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA
SANFORD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

- ✓ Go over event rules, expectations, and instructions at the beginning
 - Mute when not talking
 - How to communicate with facilitators
 - Overview of what will happen during the event
- ✓ Introduce yourself/ice breaker (invite participants to share something fun about themselves) (start the conversation/ model the expectation)
- ✓ Many creative ways to pass along the conversation (choose a friend to go next, throw an imaginary ball, etc.)
- ✓ Post-event debrief



Thank you for joining us today!

Letty Thelen

Autism Family Support Group Coordinator

USD Center for Disabilities (SD UCEDD/SD LEND)

Letty.Thelen@usd.edu or (605) 357-1418

Dr. Eric Moody

Director of Research & Evaluation

Wyoming Institute for Disabilities

Eric.Moody@uwyo.edu or (307) 399-3168



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA
SANFORD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE