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.

When it's cloudy, friends are your silver lining.
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!
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?
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
    o Chat (be sure to copy/repost pertinent info in the chat box for newcomers)
    o 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)

✓ 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