

# Ways to stay in touch with long distance family



It's important to reach out to the people you care about. Sometimes they lead busy lives and need reminders to catch up. You don't have to wait for them to contact you. Reaching out could strengthen your relationships, prevent loneliness, and even improve your health.

The holidays are a great time to reach out and get together with your loved ones. Sadly, it's often not possible for everyone to gather in the same place. Even so, it's possible to keep in touch with your family while they're far away.

Sending handwritten letters or postcards is a timeless way to stay connected. However, technology now offers faster ways to reach people around the world. And these tools don't only bridge physical distances. They also make it easier to connect with people from different generations.

## Even if it's frustrating, technology can be useful.

Margaret Davies never liked technology. However, she's happy it can help her stay close to her [grandchildren](#), even when they're far away.

[Click here](#) to hear from Margaret about how she keeps in contact with her loved ones.

## Here's how you can use technology to stay connected to your loved ones:

### Video calls

You can use various video chat applications, such as:

- Facebook Messenger – You need a Facebook account to use Messenger. You can open Messenger through your web browser or download the app onto your phone. Here's how to [video call using Messenger](#).
- Google Chat – You can [open](#) and [use](#) this application through your Gmail account. You may have to enable Chat and Meet in your Gmail settings. You can also [install](#) it as a standalone app on your device.
- FaceTime – Here's how to [make FaceTime calls](#) on your iPhone or iPad. Only Apple devices can use the FaceTime app. However, through any internet browser, Android users can access a limited web version to answer calls.
- WhatsApp – WhatsApp is free to [download](#) and [use](#). Once it's set up on your phone, you can link to the [web version](#) and use it on your computer. Here's how you can [join](#) or [start](#) video calls.
- Skype – Skype is free to download and use. Here's how to [get started with Skype](#).
- Zoom – You don't need a zoom account to [join a meeting](#) started by someone else. All you need is an invite, which will include the meeting ID and a link.

You'll be able to see and hear your loved ones in the call, whether they're a suburb away or on the other side of the world.

You can schedule a family video call for a special day that suits everyone and send a calendar invite. Here's how to send a [Google calendar invite](#). And here's how to [send invites with the Calendar app on an iPhone](#). Just remember to take time zones into account! Your smartphone or tablet can be set to remind you of the current time in other time zones.

## Group messaging chats

Ask your loved ones to create a group chat for you all. When you send a message to the group chat, everyone in the group will receive it. This way you can update each other easily with photos and well wishes during the holidays.

- Here's how to [start a group chat using Google Chat](#) with your Gmail or Google account.
- Here's how to [start a group chat using Facebook Messenger](#) with your Facebook account.
- Here's how to [start a group chat using WhatsApp](#).

## Social media

You could also use social media to stay in the loop with faraway friends and family. On a platform like Facebook, you can update all your friends at once and catch up with people in the comments section of posts.

Facebook could also help remind you of special events such as birthdays. It can make it easier to congratulate your friends on their achievements and celebrations. All you have to do is comment on their posts or write on their profile wall. Just remember that your message is public for anyone to see, so be mindful of any embarrassing memories or pictures you share!



## Online group activities

You can use technology to join in activities with others.

For example, you can watch a movie with your grandchildren using streaming services that let you sync up and watch together. You can also share YouTube videos while chatting on Google Meet. ([Here's how.](#))

Another idea is to play online games together. Games are a great way to bond with people of all ages. Some popular options include online chess, Words with Friends, or Minecraft. Or just ask to join whatever your friends or family are playing.

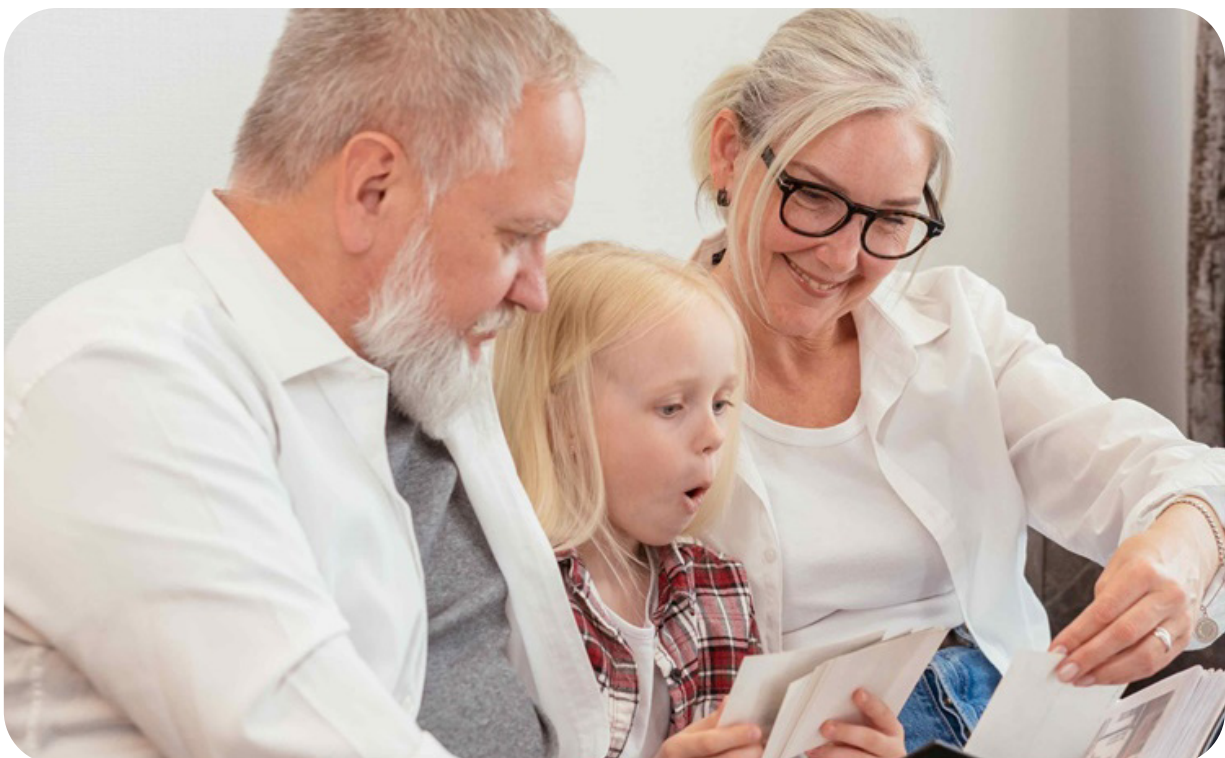
As an extra benefit, computer gaming is also associated with better memory skills and decreased risk of dementia.

## Create something together

You can use apps such as Google Photos to collaborate with your family on picture albums.

You can also create a shared music playlist together on [Spotify](#).

Online collaboration allows you to create something together even while apart. It's also a way to share things about yourself while learning more about your family. That's because it's a way to exchange treasured memories and feelings with each other.



## **Bonus tips for embracing technology:**

# **While technology can be intimidating, there are ways to make it easier.**

## **Start simple**

Look for devices that are easy to use, like tablets or smartphones with larger screens and large-text settings. Your family members or friends may have some recommendations for you.

## **Keep practising**

The more you use technology, the easier it will be to navigate. You can practice by scheduling a regular time to explore technology by:

- Trying new apps
- Writing emails
- Sending e-cards
- Making calls

## **Ask for help**

Reach out to family or tech-savvy friends or neighbours for help with learning about technology. A tech lesson from your grandkids could be a mutually beneficial way to spend some time together. Especially if you have gifts such as snacks to offer in thanks.

## **Join a class**

Your local [library](#) or community centre may have free classes or online tutorials on technology basics. This could provide you with a supportive learning environment designed for older people. You could meet like-minded people who are also trying to learn new skills.

## Make a cheat sheet

Write down what you discover about technology in a cheat sheet. This helps you both understand and remember what you've learned. Your cheat sheet can include simple instructions for things like making video calls or sending messages. Keep these notes nearby for quick reference when you need it.

## Use voice assistants

Some devices have voice-assistant features. For example, there's [Siri](#) or [Google Assistant](#). These voice-operated tools can help you send messages, make calls, set timers or alarms, or look up the answers to different questions. No typing needed! All you have to do is ask your assistant.

It's both possible and meaningful to connect with your loved ones during the holidays, even from a distance. You can strengthen your relationships with friends, family, children, and grandchildren. It helps to be open to learning some new technology skills.

You can visit the LiveUp website for more information about things such as:

- [Mental health](#) resources
- Connecting with your [community](#)
- Useful devices and [apps](#) for healthy ageing

---

## CONTACT US

**Website:** [liveup.org.au](http://liveup.org.au)

**Email:** [support@liveup.org.au](mailto:support@liveup.org.au)

**Phone:** 1800 951 971

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/LiveUpAus](https://facebook.com/LiveUpAus)

LiveUp is a healthy ageing initiative funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.