Stay in touch with other people in times of #social distancing

Do you feel the same? I noticed that people have bigger needs to have a conversation. They would love to come together and have a chat. No matter if it’s just a quick coffee, or a nice afternoon with coffee and cake. A good old coffee party.

Not possible at the moment, right? No visits to a friend’s house, no possibility of meeting in a bar or a restaurant. Times are not the best. Meeting with friends seems impossible. But: Stop. Don’t say that meeting friends is impossible. It is. Of course, it is different because of #social distancing, but you can stay in touch and you can continue with your social life. As mentioned, in a different way, but it is still possible with digital tools.

It’s called social networking and it works with social media, online conversation tools and the good old telephone.

So, let’s start.

At first, your personal network is important. To have a network means to be in touch with people you can trust. They give you the correct information, personal experience and of course advice. They also appreciate you in their networks when you have valuable information or when you tell them about your experience. So, use these people to stay in touch.

Social Media platforms like Twitter, Facebook & co. have existed for more than a decade now. And they are some of the best opportunities to talk with other people, to network and have an information exchange. Of course, it is not always easy because there are trolls outside or people sending spams all the time, and the published information is not always correct. But if you have a nice and valuable network with people you appreciate, it’s feasible. On Facebook, you can find different groups for patients but also on a variety of themes.

Some examples: Last week, I became a member of a virtual book club. We are around 40 people reading one book and meeting regularly to discuss what we have read in our
Facebook group. There is a bookshop behind this, and the shop’s team organises our talks and is available for questions.

Another group I really like is the knitters’ group. We come together, show photos of our projects, discuss patterns and yarn. It is a very nice group, a peaceful place for chatting, meeting friendly people and finding some nice themes to talk about.

Also, the patients’ groups. In these groups I can share my concerns about living with MS or about speaking with doctors. Sometimes we only do funny things, make jokes or have a simple conversation. It depends on the things keeping us busy. In times like these, there are always people who know something or can help. In these groups I am a little bit careful. I really like it, but some people are not informed enough, and they share everything. No matter if it's true or false information. So, it is always good to have that in mind and to check information before viewing it as a fact.

Another good thing is tweet chats. One hour, one hashtag and a moderator team asking questions and starting a discussion around a main theme. Ok, it is fast, and you have to read a lot, but you can also find people to chat with and create new networking contacts.

What I love at this moment are the conversations via conferencing tools or skype and facetime or google hangouts. There are coffee talks going on already, meetings and of course professional conferences and events that are carried out with these tools. And it works very well. I talk with friends and colleagues via skype, we bring our mugs with us, have some cookies and talk about the news in our families or our lives. It is a good support when you feel bad or when a depressive thought comes up, like last week as I was feeling stuck in a black hole. A friend was chatting with me and helped me out of this lousy situation. By the way, patients from different disease areas have started private initiatives to come together virtually too.

I also attended some events digitally during the last weeks and it was nice not to travel but to sit at home instead, listen to the talks, see the slides, the speakers and participants and have a valuable discussion. Questions were allowed and it was a great experience. And this was the confirmation for me, I have been saying this for years, that especially when working with patients, online conferences are a huge possibility to involve more people who wouldn't be able to travel.

Last but not least, the things we all know: Give people a call. Take your phone and have a good old chat by phone or write a letter by hand. These things make people happy!

It is worth trying every possibility, because it brings you to the people you are not allowed to meet face to face for the moment. And it helps to be in touch. By the way, it’s something I have been doing for a long time now and already before corona, because my friends don’t live in the same area as me. They live in other countries, and we cannot meet regularly or
pop in. So, we have used these alternatives for a long while and now we use it more than usual to come together and see the people we love online.

Sometimes I think #social distancing is the new trend to come together and to have fun, also with people we wouldn’t usually see. It is new for many, but it’s a good opportunity to learn something new, find out more about the possibilities and the people!

So, let’s chat online. I hope to see you soon! Virtually. Stay safe and keep the distance!

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