

Expert says family can help seniors avoid pandemic mental health crises

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maintaining [social connectedness](#) during this time is important," says Chiadi Onyike, M.B.B.S., M.D., associate professor of psychiatry and [behavioral sciences](#) at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. "It's about finding the balance—visiting in a way that is both safe for and helpful to their older family member."

The family, Onyike says, may not be aware that their relative feels isolated or even know whether there's been a recent connection with a doctor. He encourages people to ask their relatives how they are doing and, if possible, designate a tech-savvy family member to set up the older adult with a tablet or laptop, help them obtain an internet connection and show them how to meet [family](#), friends and medical providers virtually.

Many older adults are becoming increasingly isolated during the pandemic as people continue to physically distance. Families may be afraid of getting loved ones sick, seniors may sequester themselves over fear of contracting the virus or shared living facilities may have visiting restrictions. All of this contributes to loneliness, which can ultimately lead to a mental health crisis.

A mental health crisis in an older adult could be depression, anxiety or even symptoms of psychosis or dementia. Treatment of [older adults](#) with a [mental health crisis](#) can involve psychotherapy, medication (depending on the circumstances), engaging family to help facilitate care, improving the patient's tech literacy, and navigating barriers to care or other case management obstacles. Johns Hopkins Medicine physicians say family and friends can play a significant role in helping loved ones manage their care while also being on the lookout for potential signs of struggle.

"We need families to understand that physical distancing isn't the only priority, and that

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

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