

HOW TO MAINTAIN YOUR SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS DURING ONLINE SCHOOL (FOR KIDS AND TEENS)

Transitioning to online school comes with many challenges, including not being able to see your friends every day which can lead to loneliness. Maintaining relationships with people virtually can be a challenge, and it might take a little extra work than if you were going to school with them. As long as you focus on your studies, you can also make time to connect with your friends, even if you aren't physically at school with them every day.

STUDY WITH YOUR CLASSMATES

STUDY WITH YOUR FRIENDS VIRTUALLY.

Set up a time for you and your friends to meet up over video chat to work on your homework or classwork together. You can invite anyone who's available, and you can help each other out with tough problems as well.¹ Make sure you actually get your work done! It can be easy just to chat with your friends the whole time but try to work on your homework too.

PARTICIPATE IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS ONLINE.

Depending on the class or your teacher, there may be opportunities for you to chat with your classmates during your online class. If the opportunity arises, be sure to talk with your classmates about your assignment and what you need to do for the class.² Think of how you'd talk to your classmates if you were in a classic school setting together.

CREATE A BOOK CLUB TO TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE READING FOR CLASS.

If you have assigned readings, it can be helpful to talk them over with your classmates to get a new perspective. Try to schedule specific meeting times with your peers, and set goals for each meeting to get a certain amount of reading done.³ If you're having trouble putting together a book club, reach out to your teacher for help.

HANG OUT VIRTUALLY

CONNECT WITH YOUR FRIENDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

Social media is a great place to keep up with your friends and update people on what's going on in your life. If you don't have a social media presence yet, talk to your parents about setting one up. If you do have one, make sure you're following your friends on all of your accounts to stay connected with them.⁴ Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat are all popular social media sites that your friends might be using.

Scrolling aimlessly through social media might not leave you feeling very connected with your friends. Try having private conversations or commenting on their posts to get an actual connection.

TEXT YOUR FRIENDS THROUGHOUT THE DAY.

If your friends have social media accounts, there's a good chance they have a phone as well. Make sure you have all your friends' numbers and send them a few texts during the day to let them know what you're up to and ask how they're doing.⁵ To talk to all of your friends at once, try putting multiple people into a group chat so you can all text at the same time. Remember to take a break from your phone when you're doing schoolwork so you can focus!

CALL YOUR FRIENDS TO TALK TO THEM ON THE PHONE.

Texting and social media are nice, but nothing beats chatting with someone on the phone. Text your friend and ask them if they can talk, then call them up and have a conversation about how you're both doing, what you're doing to stay busy, and how school is going.⁶ Some people don't like to talk on the phone, which is okay too. You can just text or video chat instead.

SCHEDULE REGULAR ONLINE CALLS WITH A GROUP OF FRIENDS.

Video chatting is a great way to get some face-to-face communication without leaving your home. Try to schedule a video meeting when all of your friends are available. You can just hang out, play games, or work on homework together.⁷ Skype, Google Hangouts, and Zoom are free video chat apps that can host multiple people at once.

SEND YOUR FRIENDS LETTERS IN THE MAIL.

It's always fun to get stuff in the mail, especially when you're stuck at home. Ask your friend for their address and then send them a sweet note or a postcard. Stick a stamp on the package and then send it off via the postal service to start a fun pen pal relationship.⁸ If you don't have any stamps, the grocery store or your local post office have them available to buy.

DO ACTIVITIES TOGETHER

PLAY ONLINE GAMES WITH YOUR FRIENDS.

Online board games, card games, or video games are fun to play on your own, but they're even better when you're playing against your friends. Find a game that your friend group likes and create a game where you can all play at the same time.⁹ Minecraft, Fortnite, and Counter Strike are a few online multiplayer video games that you could try. Catan, Monopoly, and Scrabble are all board games that have online apps you can use. UNO, Solitaire, and Texas Hold 'Em are all card games available online.

CREATE A GROUP PLAYLIST WHERE YOU CAN ALL ADD MUSIC.

Music connects a lot of people, and your tastes probably vary slightly between your friends. Try making a playlist where all of your friends can add songs, then update it every week to see what everyone is listening to.¹⁰ You can make a collaborative playlist on Spotify or Apple Music.

JOIN IN ON SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGES TOGETHER WITH YOUR FRIENDS.

Even if you can't be in the same room as your friends, you can still all participate in the same social media challenge. Find a hashtag on Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok, then film yourself doing it and tag your friends. Hopefully, they'll do the challenge and upload it too!¹¹

Pick a challenge that's fun and safe. Never participate in dangerous activities like the Tide Pod challenge (which can be deadly), the outlet challenge (which creates electrical sparks that can lead to a fire), or the salt and ice challenge (which is painful and has resulted in burns and scarring). You can even participate in an educational challenge, like #SafeHands from the World Health Organization that challenges users to upload a video of themselves washing their hands safely.¹²

MEET UP WITH YOUR FRIENDS ON THE WEEKEND, IF YOU CAN.

If both you and your friends have been taking the right measures to protect their health, like wearing masks in public, you might be able to meet up in person. Talk to your parents about getting together with your friends outdoors for a small, socially distant gathering. You can play games, throw a ball around, or simply sit and chat with each other. Seeing your friends in person is always nice and finding a way to do that can be super helpful for your mental well-being.¹³

Always follow the social distancing guidelines set by your state or county and talk to your parents about following safety measures before you head out. Be sure to wear a mask whenever you're within 6 feet (1.8 m) of someone who isn't part of your household. It's worth noting that some of your friends (or their parents) might not be comfortable hanging out with in person yet, which is also okay and shouldn't be taken personally.

WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE HELP?

If you still feel overwhelmed, unable to cope and as though your loneliness is affecting how you function every day, you may be experiencing the first signs of a mental health condition, like depression or anxiety.

Take the youth screen at **MHAScreening.org** to see if you may be at risk. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps.

This article was authored in partnership with wikiHow, the world's largest "how to" site, and also featured at [www.wikihow.com/Maintain-Your-Social-Relationships-During-Online-School-\(for-Kids-and-Teens\)](http://www.wikihow.com/Maintain-Your-Social-Relationships-During-Online-School-(for-Kids-and-Teens)).

SOURCES

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