

St Cuthbert's Hospice



How to stay connected when you can't visit a loved one at St Cuthbert's Hospice

It is a difficult time for us all whilst we are restricted from getting together with family and friends in the way we would like to.

This is particularly painful for those at the Hospice who are unable to welcome their loved ones at this time and who want to stay connected. This is equally difficult for family and friends who are unable to visit the Hospice, particularly when someone important to us is unwell or very much approaching the end of their life and we can't physically be near them. Even though they are surrounded by people who are compassionately caring for them, it can be very hard to be apart and show them just how much you care.

Here are some suggestions of ways that you and your loved one can feel closer together whilst apart. If you require help completing any of these ideas, please do let us know. Ask to speak with a member of the Family Support Team or contact us on 0191 386 1170 option 2.

Phones and tablets

Try and make sure your loved one has a phone or tablet and charger for this device with them. There is free Wi-Fi in the Hospice so your loved one will be able to access this at all times.

If children in the family will be speaking by video with the person at the Hospice, remember to gently prepare the children for what they may look like, particularly if there have been any changes in their appearance since the last time they saw them. Prepare children for what they might see in the room. For example, if there is any medical equipment such as oxygen tubes, you can explain that that they are there to help them breathe. If they are very poorly and you do not want children to see them like this, you could consider a phone call instead.

If children are talking on the phone or video call, encourage them to say goodbye at the end of the conversation. This ensures they will always have had the opportunity to do this, just in case they don't have the opportunity again. You don't have to be obvious about this, simply just remind them at the end of the call to "say goodbye now" as they usually would if they were on the telephone.

Recording a message

If you're not sure about what to say on the phone, or the person is too tired or poorly to speak to you, you could record a voice or video message. You could share some special messages about how much you love them and how you are thinking of them. Maybe share some family jokes or memories, or read them a story. Or you could just tell them about your day, what you've been up to, what you had for dinner, who you've spoken to. Children in the family could record individual messages and then a joint one. When you send a recorded message to their phone, they can listen to or watch it as often as they want.

Sounds of home

Sometimes it's the little unique things about home that are most comforting: the dog barking, children thundering down the stairs or the sound of a water feature in the garden. You could make a recording of some of the sounds that are special to your home that will help your loved one feel connected.

Listening to music

If you have a special family song or piece of music, you could ask the person caring for your loved one to play this to them at an agreed time of day. You can listen to it at home at the same time, so you are listening together. You could even make a playlist of lots of songs for them using sites like YouTube or apps like Spotify.

Writing a message

You could send in a letter or card for the person to read, or for someone to read out to them. It could just be a chatty letter, or it could include important things you'd like to say to them. Sometimes it is hard to find the right words, particularly if your relationship with the person has been difficult at times, or if you're not used to talking about how you feel. If you're looking for help to start you off, try completing **Julie Stokes' Little Box of Big Thoughts** which is included at the end of this document.

If you're writing a short message you could write it in a card, or if you're good at crafts you could try making an origami heart and writing your message inside. Children could draw pictures for the person, and you could make a collage of family photos. Rather than posting the things you make, you could take photos of them and send them via phone. You could even take photos of the process of making these. We have a selection of handmade cards at the Hospice for you to use if you would like. Please just let us know.

Fabric or Crocheted Hearts & Rainbows

You could cut a heart shape from any material such as an old piece of clothing. The heart could then be attached to your loved one's night clothes to be with them at all times. That way they will still have you close to them. Children could also make friendship bracelets or simple plaits with coloured threads that represent things they love about the person. We have a selection of handmade crocheted hearts and rainbows if you would like a pair of ours to use please do let us know.

Something to hold

You could send something comforting in for your loved one to keep close. It might be a cuddly toy or something that can represent you and your family at home. Or maybe a blanket, jumper or something else that is comforting to touch. Children could give it a cuddle first, and then it could be given to your loved one to keep close to them. You could give it a spray of your favourite aftershave or perfume so that it smells of you. Scents are powerful reminders of those we love. You could put scented flowers, dried herbs or leaves in the middle of a circle of fabric to make a little bag. Gather the fabric in and tie it with a ribbon or string: no sewing needed.

Pairs

If you have two of the same thing, you could keep one at home and send one to be at the Hospice. Perhaps two cuddly toys, two pebbles from your garden, two ornaments, or even two mugs with the same design. If one of these is near each of you, it can help you feel connected. Ask us if you'd like a pair of our crocheted hearts or rainbows.

Beyond the door visualisation

This is a simple technique you can use together with the person caring for your loved one, to help them feel connected to you. Ask the person caring for them to help you with it.

Over the phone, ask your loved one to look towards the door of their room. You can say something like 'Beyond that door, not too far away, I am here, thinking about you, sending you all my/our love. Just beyond that door, you should be able to feel it from where you are, you are not alone. I want you to remember that if you feel worried or lonely later, you are not alone.' You may prefer to explain this in your own way. This will help your loved one remember the love and connection in their life even when you are not physically there with them.

The person caring for your loved one can also prompt them by reminding them that 'Beyond that door, everyone you love is thinking about you and sending you love.' Remind the person caring that they can repeat the simple phrase to help your loved one stay connected and close to you. And when you speak to your loved one on the phone, as you end your call, you might like to again remind them 'Don't forget, we are just beyond the door, thinking of you and sending you love'.

Your own ideas

You may have many ideas that are personal and helpful to you and your family at this very difficult time. Although you may not be able to physically be there, you will help them so much by thinking of them. Please let us know if we can help you to fulfil any of your own ideas.

Little Box of Big Thoughts

In each box write a few sentences inspired by the prompt.

Little Box of Big Thoughts	You make me so proud because...	One wish I have is...
The things I really miss when we're apart are...	Remember when...	I love you because...
I'm grateful for...	In tough times, remember...	A special memory I have is...