

Have I Lost My Mind, Or Is My Pillow Talking To Me?

How Technology Can Keep Us Connected To Aging Parents | By Joy Loverde

Have you ever had a long-distance love affair? Then you know it's not easy to stay connected across the miles. Oh, sure, everything seemed doable in the beginning with the help of romantic phone calls, gifts, greeting cards and weekend visits; but as time went on, the blush of romance faded as the day-to-day logistics of managing the relationship from far away slowly got the best of you.

Now, picture the lovers as aging parents and their out-of-town children and grandchildren. As we go about doing whatever it takes to make time for each other—from making weekly calls to juggling multiple personal and professional calendars, to struggling to arrange to be physically there—we're back in the same boat (without the lure of lust and roses).

Thanks to the times we live in and the wonders of technology, it's becoming easier to maintain family ties with elderly relatives in spite of the miles that come between us. The world is changing, and more changes will come in the future, influencing the way we relate as family.

To jump-start the process of staying in touch through the use of technology, here are some of my favorite high-tech ideas from my book, *The Complete Eldercare Planner*:

Presto! You're Connected



Presto service and printing mailbox

worst yet, owns a computer that's doing nothing more than collecting dust), then Presto is for you. And with Mother's Day right around the corner, this product will make a wonderful and unique gift.

The **Presto** service and printing mailbox makes it easy for parents to enjoy e-mail without a computer. Plug in the printing mailbox, set up an e-mail account, and Mom and Dad receive regular e-mails from you, including digital photos of you and the grandchildren that are automatically printed on standard plain paper. Easy to share, easy to receive, and Mom and Dad will no longer feel as though they are left out of the loop

Long ago, you and I were indoctrinated to a world of e-mail and Blackberrys, Wi-Fi and video conferencing while at the same time our parents increasingly became strangers to this brave new world. If your elderly family member continues to shun the thought of anything computer related (or

when family members exchange e-mails with each other.

Family Browser Groups and Web sites

Imagine: No more phone tag! Family members living anywhere in the world can communicate in constant, real-time by creating a family browser group. Post photos, create bulletin boards, set up appointments, share news, coordinate calendars and arrange family events, delegate responsibilities and much more.

Yahoo! Group, for example, pools information and makes it available to numerous family members so it eliminates the need to repeat the same information or keep track of huge volumes of e-mail. With browser groups, all the correspondence is in one place and family members can easily monitor who's doing what.

And, when a medical emergency arises and a parent needs more care, the browser group offers a system for tracking medical appointments and creating lists of doctors and medications. Also, if a family member researches a medical-related topic, he or she can post the results and the appropriate links so everyone can review it and have all the latest information. When it's clear that our parents need more help, or if the family is spread out across the globe, online family networks are the only way to go.

Family Web sites will also proliferate and allow us to regularly post a variety of family activities including still and video pictures of the children as they grow, recorded memories, family histories, recipes, birthday parties and celebrations, school events, and family-related newsletters. Relatives and friends from far and near will be able to watch and participate as the family evolves.

Cell Phone: A New Generation

In the early days, cell phones were easy to use. Perhaps the fact that they were the size of a brick had something to do with it. As cellular went digital, great new things started to happen and all of a sudden we had instant access to cameras and videos, Internet connection and text messaging. But all this new technology left a large segment of the senior population behind. And now that cell phones have shrunk to the size of a credit card, who can argue with parents when they say that the keypad is hard to see, the unit itself is confusing to operate and difficult to hear on, and handling the phone itself is a nightmare? These days, convincing parents that a cell phone is something they can't live without may be an impossible goal.



The super-sized Jitterbug

There is a solution for seniors who struggle with

Resources for Staying in Touch in Aging Parents

The Complete Eldercare Planner: Where to Start, Questions to Ask, How to Find Help (Random House, second edition; \$19.95). Available online and everywhere books are sold.

Presto! You're Connected
www.presto.com

The Wright Stuff
A comprehensive resource for products for the elderly
www.thewright-stuff.com