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# Apart but connected

*Here's how to hang out with loved ones this fall*

By Emily Jones
*Express Staff Writer*

The coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly robbed us of many daily comforts we enjoyed not all that long ago: Hugs; leisurely chats in the grocery store line; handshakes; fist-bumps; kisses; smiles unobscured by masks.

But loneliness and isolation aren't a given as we move indoors, says Paul Zimmerman, tech expert at The Community Library in Ketchum and self-described "digital therapist." With a few technological adjustments, in fact, we can help replicate the calming diversions of our pre-pandemic lives.

"When you're connecting with someone remotely, geography is no longer part of the equation. It's easy to get stuck on the thought that [video conferencing apps] can't give social value to situations," he said. "But that's just not true."

Zimmerman said it's the context in which we use technology—not the apps themselves—that has value.

"Things may be physically different, sure, but you can still harness the same feelings and emotions [virtually] during holidays," he said. "Halloween, for example. What's to stop you from doing a walk-through of your own haunted house with the kids and sharing it with another household over FaceTime?"

Fortunately, celebrating Thanksgiving and Christmas over video this year should be relatively "low-hanging fruit" for the average tech user, Zimmerman said.

"I'll be making turkey live on video and my dad will be doing the same thing," he said. "The tech will connect us—that's its job."

Zimmerman hosts lectures at the library to help adults better navigate social media and video conferencing platforms. His next virtual workshop, "Bridging the Digital Divide," is geared toward the less tech-savvy and will be livestreamed at livestream.com/comlib on Wednesday, Oct. 14, from 6-7 p.m. (To submit tech-related questions you'd like to see answered during the session, email mwilliams@comlib.org.)

In the meantime, here are five platforms that beginners can use to get started with video chatting: