

HOW TO REDUCE THE WORRY AND MAKE IT EASIER TO CHECK ON LOVED ONES

You care for an elderly parent, relative or sick friend. Perhaps you call, to brighten up their day. Maybe you do much more. Bringing happiness to their life is very rewarding but can sometimes be challenging.

However, you can't be there all the time. Studies show that loneliness and social isolation can impact gravely on quality of life and well-being. There's a significant and lasting effect on blood pressure [1], and links to poor sleep [2], dementia and Alzheimer's [3], depression [4] and higher mortality rates [5]. What can you do?

Konnekt's series of articles helps you improve the quality of life for the elderly or sick you care about. In this **part 3**, we share recommendations on how to reduce the worry of being unable to contact your loved ones, and make it easier for you to get in touch to check that they're OK.

Ring Ring, Why Don't You Answer My Call?

Jane and Bill love talking to friends and family. Jane lives alone – like 2 million other Australians – so her phone is her connection to the outside world. Bill lives with (and helps care for) his wife and has two adult children who check on him most days.

Jane and Bill don't always get to the phone on time. They have trouble hearing, move slowly and like to take naps. Bill and his wife have voicemail or an answering machine but rarely check it or don't fully understand it. Jane's son Ralph becomes stressed when Jane doesn't answer, and Ralph sometimes worries that Jane is on the floor – with a broken hip or worse – unable to cry for help.

Making the Connection

Fortunately, help is at hand for Jane, Bill and their friends and family. If you can relate to their stories, you might like to try these ideas.

- **Extended ringing time.** If incoming calls divert to voicemail too quickly, it's easy to change:
 - From a Telstra fixed-line phone service: Pick up the phone, enter *99, enter the number of seconds (between 05 and 55) that you wish the phone to ring before a call is diverted, press # and hang up. The default is only about 20 seconds (6 or 7 rings). For example, to set it to 55 seconds, enter ***99 55 #**.
 - From a Telstra mobile phone, enter (dial) this sequence as if you are making a phone call: ****61*101****, (number of seconds: 15, 20, 25 or 30) #, then press call/send (as if making a call). The default is only about 15 seconds. To set it to 30 seconds, enter ****61*101**30#**.
 - If you use Telstra Message2Txt: Call 13 2200 for help, or try forwarding to Telstra's Missed Call service 0418 707 111 after 30 secs by entering: ****61*0418707111**30#**.
 - From an Optus mobile phone, enter (dial) this sequence as if you are making a phone call: ****61*321****, (number of seconds: 05, 10, 15, 20, 25 or 30) #, then press

call/send (as if making a call). The default is only about 15 seconds. To set it to 30 seconds, enter ****61*321**30#**. If you need to change this while you're overseas/using roaming, use the codes above and simply replace '321' with the international access number: '+61411000321'.

- **Disable voicemail.** You might like to completely disable voicemail if it is never checked, to prevent the caller from wasting money and, more importantly, to prevent the caller from assuming that his message will be listened to. Contact your phone service provider.
- **Cordless phones.** You can purchase a cordless phone for your home fixed-line service. The phone's base unit remains plugged into the phone line, while the handset can be carried around the home – preventing the need to rush to the phone. The disadvantages are:
 - If left off the base for more than a week or two (check the specifications), the handset's battery will discharge.
 - The phone may be left in another room inadvertently, or completely forgotten.
 - The buttons on many cordless phones are small, hard to read and complicated.
 - The charger or mains adaptor may be disconnected inadvertently.

For these reasons, we suggest augmenting rather than replacing your existing fixed-line handset, or buying one with a base that can be used without its portable handset.

Look for a cordless phone with:

- Two or three handsets with individual chargers that can be left in multiple rooms such as the main bedroom, kitchen and TV room.
 - A speakerphone in the base unit that can be used without the handset.
 - The ability to make and receive calls, at least from the base, during a power blackout.
 - Big, easy-to-use buttons.
- **Multiple phones.** To avoid the disadvantages of cordless phones, purchase additional regular (wired) phones instead, and have them wired into your fixed-line phone service by a professional installer. We suggest installing the same phone model throughout the home.
 - **Extension Ringer.** For those who have difficulty hearing the phone ring, an extension ringer will amplify the ring volume. If you want the phone to ring at the other end of the home or in the garage or shed, we suggest you install an additional phone there instead.
 - **Visual Alert.** For those with a hearing impairment, this device will switch an incandescent lamp on and off in time with the telephone ring to show when you have an incoming call.
 - **Caller Number Display.** With a subscription to Calling Number Display (CND), a compatible phone or attachment can show you the number of the last caller (as long as it is not a blocked number) and allow you to return the call quickly. Some devices can also show the caller's name. However, many users will find this technical gadget to be just too complicated.

Friendly neighbour

If you have a relative or close friend you care for who lives alone, we suggest you visit one or two friendly neighbours (perhaps with small presents) and ask for their phone numbers so that if there is

no answer when your loved one should be at home and awake, a neighbour can walk over and knock on the door for you. Choose neighbours who are likely to be home most of the time, such as the retired, the home-workers and the stay-at-home Mums and Dads.

Key safe

A “key safe” is a very small safe with a combination lock (that you can purchase from a hardware store or locksmith), just big enough to house one or two keys. We recommend that people who live alone have a key safe installed on their front porch and give the combination to one or two trusted children or carers. Neighbours can be given the phone numbers of the children/carers so that in an emergency (such as when phone calls and door knocking remain unanswered), the neighbour can

KONNEKT VIDEOPHONE: CHECK IN OFTEN, REDUCE THE WORRY

- Face-to-face calling: Check health, happiness, habits, and signs of distress
- Reduce the worry: Auto-answer for trusted children or a nominated carer, with full two-way video and sound, in case they can't answer
- Extra loud ringing: Hear incoming calls from across a large home
- Extra-long ring time: We set it up to ring as long as you like... no more rush
- Just one touch: Call or answer with a single touch
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call the child or carer to find out the combination and – with permission – gain access to the home.

Conclusion

In this article, we've shown you how to make it easier for you to get in touch with your loved ones to check that they're OK, and reduce the worry of being unable to contact them. In the **next article** of our series, we'll help you **reduce phone fear** and **relieve answering anxiety** with some easy tips and ingenious products and services.

Konnekt is an Australian company that has developed an incredibly simple, one-touch Videophone. The elderly and sick can talk **face-to-face** with family and friends, as often as they want, without the travel. To learn about the Konnekt Videophone or to subscribe to receive future Konnekt articles with tips to help improve quality of life, visit Konnekt at www.konnekt.com.au.

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