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August 19, 2021

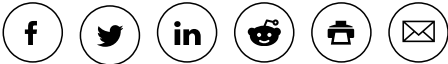
# Better than normal social engagement

[Melinda Cole](#)

[Natalie Kravitz](#)



[Charles de Vilmorin](#)



Melinda Cole and Natalie Kravitz

More than a year and a half into the global coronavirus pandemic, we are now entering a period in which senior living communities across the nation can safely open their doors to families, visitors and the broader community.

At the same time, residents are now able to leave their rooms and re-engage with their communities without fear of contracting the deadly virus.

This nationwide reopening is an exciting time as staff, residents and families in communities can reconnect with each other in meaningful ways.

It is important to remember during this time however that not all residents are eager to leave their room after many months in quarantine. This is proving to be an unexpected challenge for many communities as some residents turn down opportunities for social engagement.

Some are resisting engagement because they are still understandably fearful about the pandemic. For others, the time spent on their own in the community for safety reasons has become a habit and they have become used to that distance. Sadly, for some residents, the pandemic quarantine has meant that they have experienced extreme declines in their physical and cognitive capacities and struggle to participate in group or even one-on-one activities any longer.

For residents that are struggling to emerge from their room for any of those reasons, we cannot just be OK with offering the status quo in terms of engagement for them. Instead, activity



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and life enrichment professionals and team members across departments in every community need to come together to develop personalized strategies for these residents so that they are offered better than normal social engagement opportunities.



Charles de Vilmorin

Based on discussions we have had with clients in recent months, there are recommendations to address the three reasons why residents are choosing not to come out of their room and socialize:

### 1. Fear

- Education is key when reassuring residents that it is safe and reminding them that current procedures are in place to keep everyone safe.
- Start with small steps such as programs close to their room with smaller groups.
- Celebrate even small wins and share successful stories! Remember to never force someone to do something they do not want to.

### 2. Habit

- Remind them of the community they are a part of and invite them to programs that meet their preferences.
- Invite their families and friends to help in person or by phone.
- Create a buddy system with other elders – find champions.

### 3. Change in Physical and Cognitive Wellbeing

- Increase 1:1 offerings for residents.
- Ensure the interdisciplinary team is aware of any challenges and that they help address them collaboratively.
- Always remember that positive change can happen very fast once we understand who the resident is and successfully create a person-first experience.

As we continue to celebrate our reopening after all that we have gone through, let's make sure that everyone in our community is enjoying this process and its benefits whether it is our elders, their families or our care partners. Let's celebrate all wins big and small!

*Melinda Cole is a Resident Engagement Specialist, Certified Dementia Practitioner, and Validation Method Worker who has worked in the Life Enrichment field of Senior Care for 20 years. Her passion is to assist Senior Care Professionals in creating opportunities for their residents to find a sense of purpose through meaningful engagement.*

*Natalie Kravitz is a Resident Engagement Specialist at Linked Senior and has served 17 years in the activity professional field where she acquired certifications as a Certified Activities Director, and a Certified Dementia Practitioner. Natalie presently utilizes those certifications and experience in her role to foster the relationships of Activity Directors and their residents, internationally, by offering tools and modifications to enhance activities through technology and supporting the staff in providing programming needs and promoting resident well-being.*

*Charles de Vilmorin is the CEO and co-founder of Linked Senior.*

*The opinions expressed in McKnight's Long-Term Care News guest submissions are the author's and are not necessarily those of McKnight's Long-Term Care News or its editors.*

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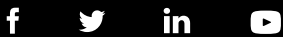
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