

Visiting Residents in Long-Term Care Facilities During the Holidays

Visits from family members can be an important support for a resident's emotional well-being and can help ensure that residents receive quality care. Visits are a valuable time to look for changes in residents' health and mental status. Family members should see progress towards meeting the goals in the care plan.

When and how can I visit my loved one?

Under the Nursing Home Reform Law of 1987, residents have the right, and the facility must provide for, immediate access to any resident by immediate family or other relatives of the resident, subject to the resident's consent. **Residents and family members have the right to decide what visits involve and when they take place.** Respect the rights of other residents during visits.

Tips and activity ideas for visiting your loved one

There are many ways for families and long-term care residents to enjoy the holidays together:

- Plan your visits around what makes you and your loved one comfortable. For example, you may want to visit at bedtime to help your loved one fall asleep.
- Visit at different times of the day and week to see the care that your loved one receives at all times.
- Speak slowly and clearly, but not artificially. Lower the tone of your voice. People with hearing impairments can often hear lower tones better.
- When approaching your loved one or another resident, walk slowly and calmly. Try to make eye contact to ensure that they are aware of your presence.
- If your loved one is in bed or in a wheelchair, pull up a chair, bend or crouch to maintain eye contact.
- Visit in a noise-free environment. Ask if you may turn off the television during your visit or ask your loved one if they would like to move to a quieter area of the home.
- Ask/arrange to eat a meal with your loved one at her facility.
- Offer to accompany your loved one to a scheduled activity or program.
- Decorate your loved one's room, do a craft, write cards together, or bring their favorite holiday foods to help them remember holiday traditions and feel excited.
- Sing holiday songs, look at photo albums, or watch family videos. Carry on and adapt family traditions to maintain family identity and feelings of belonging.
- Spend time together: take a walk, watch their favorite TV show or movie, read out loud, or talk about your family or current events.
- Carefully assess where your loved one with memory loss should spend the holiday; spending the holiday away from home may not be something they enjoy. Taking them on short outings before the holiday can make the transition easier if visiting other places.
- Describe your loved one's condition and behavior to non-frequent visitors. Look at photos and talk with your loved one about who will be visiting.
- Watch your loved one for signs of distress, frustration, and difficulty communicating. Try not to overwhelm them with many visitors. Quiet distractions can help a resident with memory loss to calm down.
- Take pleasure in your visits and the joy that you share. Though your loved one may not be able to converse a great deal, it is important to spend time together.
- If possible, tell your loved one when you will be returning for your next visit.
- Keep a guest book in your loved one's room so that visitors and family members can communicate with one another.

Ways to Engage in Long-Term Care Facilities

During gift-giving season, residents can feel discouraged and left out of the gift-giving process if they don't have the money to buy gifts, if they are not able to get to a store (due to health constraints or limited transportation), or if they don't remember that it is holiday season. Below are some ways that you can include your loved one in the gift giving season.

- Wrap holiday gifts together.
- Write greeting cards together.
- Create a collage together of pictures of families and friends.
- Ask/arrange to bake cookies or prepare another food you can share together.
- Decorate seasonal wreaths for your doors.
- Create a piece of artwork together.
- Ask your loved one to talk about their life or family; tell your loved one this gift of family history will be valued by the whole family and future generations.
- Give a gift that doesn't feel like it needs to be reciprocated – like spending time together or doing an activity together.
- Give a gift, while stating that it is repayment for all the gifts they gave you over the years such as homemade cookies, a new sweater, etc.

Examples of Gifts for Residents

Residents of long-term care facilities often have a limited amount of living and personal storage space; this can make it harder to pick a gift that your loved one will enjoy and has room for. Below are some ideas of gifts that your loved one might enjoy.

- Clothing with large buttons
- Fluffy bath towel or robe
- Non-skid slippers
- Lap blankets
- Stationary
- Picture frames (digital or traditional)
- Framed artwork from a grandchild or relative
- Photo album of family and friends
- Large print crossword puzzles
- Calendar marked with important dates and events (family birthdays, anniversaries, etc.)
- Favorite Books
- Magazine or newspaper subscription
- Gift cards
- Easy-to-use VCR, DVD player, CD player or tape player
- Favorite movies, CDs, or tapes
- Lotion
- Plants (fake or real)
- Sun catchers for the window
- Collage or bulletin board of pictures of families and friends
- Large number clocks, or clocks that announce the time when prompted.
- Decorative items for doors (wreaths, knockers, etc.)
- Gift certificates to a facility beauty parlor or barber (for manicure, pedicure, hairstyling, etc.)
- Consumer Voice Enrichment Booklet

Be sure to add any new belongings to your loved one's inventory sheet and put your loved one's name on the items to help prevent damage, loss, or theft. Also consider speaking with a member of the nursing home staff if you have questions about the appropriateness or safety of a particular gift for your loved one.