

## **Visiting an Older Loved One is the Best Holiday Gift You Can Give!**

There's no doubt about it, the best part of the holidays are visits shared with the people we care about.

With the holidays fast approaching, many residents in long-term care facilities will begin to eagerly await a visit from an out-of-town friend or family member. That's why it's so disheartening to know that 60% of skilled nursing facility residents receive no visitors at all. I would like to encourage your readers to make time this holiday season -- and on into the New Year -- to visit their family and friends in skilled nursing facilities. Because the holiday season can be a time of loneliness for many older people, a visit from you will be the best gift they can receive this holiday season.

Also, visiting an older loved one with your children is a wonderful opportunity for everyone and an important learning experience for kids to develop an ease, sense of respect and gain an appreciation for the immense value of all of our generations.

Here are some tips for your visit:

- Call before you visit and find out if your loved one has any needs such as personal items, clothing or other necessities. Set up a time with your loved one in advance - looking forward to the visit will extend the pleasure for them and you. Think about when the person is at his or her best and suggest this timeframe for a visit. Also, find out if there are specified visiting hours. If the person has a memory impairment ask staff for their suggestions and support during a visit. Sometimes just enjoying the moment can fulfill many needs for the resident and you.
- Prepare your children ahead of time. For example, if you're taking them to visit Grandma or Grandpa, let them know that there will be other people around them. Children of all ages are generally welcomed in a nursing facility. Make them aware that some of those people may be in a wheelchair, using a walker or may be in bed.
- Take your loved one things that will brighten their day, such as holiday treats you know they can have, artwork your kids made in school, planters and family pictures.
- Spend your visit listening attentively. Encourage them to share some of their favorite holiday memories with you.
- With the proper preparation, the experience can be fun and rewarding for the whole family. Visitors should consider engaging in activities that are stimulating to the resident such as attending an activity with the resident; taking a walk – inside or outside if the weather is permitting; watching a favorite TV show or reading to the resident, playing an instrument or singing songs. Singing old remembered songs is particularly good with visits to those that have a memory disease.
- If you are visiting a relative or friend for the first time, understand that this could be an emotional visit. You will need to give yourself time to become acclimated to the new surroundings. Get to know the staff, other residents and their visitors.
- See if you can stay for mealtime. This way, you'll be able to meet some of your loved ones' friends. After all, they are the people your loved one will be spending the holiday season with.

A most critical time for visitation is after the holidays. The dark days of January and February can be a particularly lonely time for older adults. This is a great time for another visit. This is also a terrific time to recall the holidays, share pictures, cards and letters with them and spend some meaningful time together. If you work with groups such as Scouts, a school or a church, this is actually a better time to carol and celebrate! The holiday time is so busy for everyone. Doing something after the holidays can be much more enjoyable for all.



If miles separate you from your loved one, consider sending them a card or a care package. Knowing that you're thinking of them will surely brighten their mood. Or, if you don't know anyone who is a resident of a skilled nursing facility, consider doing something nice for a facility in your community. Even the smallest gestures can make all the difference in the world to someone who needs it the most.