

Memory Moment

Tips for Visiting with Someone with Dementia

Holidays are a time for visiting with relatives, neighbors and friends you haven't seen in a while. Enjoying the hustle and bustle, candies and cookies, music, gift giving, and general camaraderie are some of the enjoyable (and exhausting) parts of the holidays. People living with dementia can enjoy the holiday visits, too, but in a more subdued way. Understanding more about dementia and ways to communicate can make for a great visit.

As a caregiver, you want your loved one to have a good visit with their visitors, but not become too tired, agitated or frustrated. Preparing both the visitor and your loved one is essential. Here are some tips for planning visits from Dailycaring.com and the National Institute on Aging.

- a. Limit visitors to 1 or 2 people at a time. Too many can be overwhelming.
- b. Schedule visits for the time of day when your older adult is usually at their best.
- c. Minimize distractions by keeping the environment calm and quiet. Turn off the TV or loud music.
- d. Let your visitors know ahead of time what they can expect with your loved one.
 - a. Give examples of unusual behavior that may take place (incontinence, eating with fingers, wandering or hallucinations).
 - b. Send a current picture of your loved one.
 - c. Explain that memory loss or unusual behaviors are part of the disease and not intentional.
 - d. Stress that the meaningfulness of the moment together matters. Creating moments of joy can make both the person living with dementia and the visitor feel happy.

To prepare your loved one living with dementia for a visit, the NIA ADEAR Center offers these tips:

- a. Begin showing a photo of the guest to the person a week before arrival. Each day, explain who the visitor is while showing the photo. Sometimes your loved one may become **agitated** if you tell them someone is coming for a visit. They may ask over and over “when are they coming?” If this is the case, just mention who the person is, not that they are coming for a visit.
- b. Arrange a phone, Duo, or Facetime call with the visitor, which gives the visitor an idea of what to expect and the person with dementia an opportunity to become familiar with the visitor.
- c. Keep the person living with dementia to their routine as close to normal as possible.
- d. Guard against fatigue and find a time and a place for adequate rest.

The basic techniques for communicating with someone living with dementia are important to having a meaningful visit. Some of them are:

1. Be friendly and positive
2. Speak slowly and in a normal tone (unless they are hearing impaired)
3. Make eye contact and stay at their eye level.
4. Introduce yourself and your relationship to them. Example: “Hi, Grandma, I’m John, your grandson.”
5. Use short sentences with one idea at a time. Give them extra time to speak or answer questions. 15 seconds is a good rule of thumb.
6. Share and discuss memories of the past. They may remember those.
7. Bring an activity, photo album, something to read out loud, their favorite music to listen to.
8. Give hugs, gentle touches or massage arms or shoulders if the person gives permission and enjoys it.
9. Don’t argue or say “do you remember”. It can cause anger or embarrassment.
10. Don’t point out mistakes or talk down to them.
11. If they say mean or nasty things, remember it is the disease.

Keeping all these tips in mind can make a visit with your loved one living with dementia a meaningful, enjoyable experience for everyone!

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out the website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.