

Managing Holiday Events and Activities

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Right at Home, In Home Care & Assistance

“With the holidays and school vacations coming up, I never have enough time to meet all the demands on my time. I care for my aging parents, yet have children at home. How do I divide my time during the holidays without feeling guilty? Is there a way for everyone to share the same holiday activities?” - Sherri, age 48.

Many of us share Sherri’s concern. Caring for our aging parents or ill loved ones takes a lot of physical and emotional energy. Add the demands of children at home, perhaps a job and the chaos of the holidays: it’s no wonder we feel overwhelmed.

Few of us choose to be caregivers but accept the responsibility as our loved ones’ abilities decline. Try to remember being a caregiver is a “season” in our lives. Just like sleepless nights with a newborn baby this stage will pass. Find a way to take joy in special moments as they happen.

Keep your family from being swept up into the busyness of the holidays. Talk with your family and allow each member to choose one tradition that is important to them. Focus on those and eliminate the others. Simplify and adapt the chosen tradition to fit your current situation: have family members each contribute a dish to the holiday dinner, put up fewer decorations this year.

Try to select a few activities that are intergenerational so everyone can be together. This will not only maximize your time but create some enjoyable times to remember. With aging or declining loved ones early memories and skills are often retained the longest. Use family members’ previous interests and hobbies as a starting point for possible activities.

Keep it Simple:

- Reduce your expectations. Eliminate the word “should” from your vocabulary.
- Ask for the gift of time. Ask family members to each have a scheduled one-on-one time with your loved one so you can have some time to yourself.
- Try to schedule activities early in the day to avoid fatigue.
- Keep the daily routine as close to normal as possible.
- Prepare guests who haven’t seen your loved one for awhile.
- Accept help when offered.
- Hold a family meeting to discuss shared responsibilities.
- Having a family function at your home? Assign each person a job as they arrive: Take coats, clear plates, etc.
- Be specific when asking family members for help.
- Take 15 minutes a day for yourself.
- One activity a day is enough to keep from being over stimulating.

Here are some suggested intergenerational activities which are wheelchair accessible in the Grand Rapids Area:

- Catch a matinee of “**The Sound of Music**” playing at the Civic Theater, November 15-December 16. (616) 222-6650, www.grct.org
- Bundle up in warm clothes to watch the **tree lighting ceremony** at the Gerald Ford Museum on November 15 at 7 PM. 616-254-0400, www.ford.utexas.edu
- Kick off the holiday season by attending the **St. Cecilia holiday concert** for the whole family on December 2nd at 3 PM. (616) 459-2224, www.stcecilia.portfoliocms.com
- Pack up the car, bring some hot chocolate and drive through the **NiteLites** at Fifth Third Ballpark, November 16- January 5. (616) 538-0731, www.christmaslitesgr.com
- Visit the **Public Museum of Grand Rapids** to see something for every one: a planetarium show; the Supremes, Reflections exhibition; or wander through 1920’s Grand Rapids shops at your own pace. 616-456-3977, www.grmuseum.org
- Visit the new Grand Rapids Art Museum. Don’t miss the **Chris VanAllsburg drawings**, an exhibition of 76 drawings by the author and illustrator known for the book turned movie, the Polar Express. (616) 831-1000, www.gramonline.org
- See **Christmas and Holiday Traditions Around the World** at Frederick Meijer Gardens, Nov 21-Dec 31. 888-957-1580, www.meijergardens.org
- Watch a **movie in 3D** at the IMAX Theater. Follow your family’s interests or go informational with Deep Sea 3D, Wild Safari 3D, Wild Chimpanzees or the holiday theme with the Polar Express. (616) 530-7469, www.celebrationcinema.com

At home:

- Take an early evening drive (it’s dark before 6 pm this time of year) to see holiday decorations in your area. Make the car cozy by bringing some blankets and hot cider. Turn it into a scavenger hunt by making a list of decorations you’ll try to find.
- Hang a bird feeder that attaches to the window with suction cups. Spend some quiet time watching the birds that come.
- Pick a simple favorite family recipe and create it together.
- Pull out some older photo albums. Look for a baby picture of each family member.
- Find beautifully illustrated holiday books at the library and read aloud together. Give the children and adults each a turn.
- Rent a classic holiday movie and watch it together.

Caregiver’s Corner is provided as a public service of the Caregiver Resource Network. The **Caregiver Resource Network** is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American’s Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.caregiverresource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.