

Caregiver's Corner Column (December 2014)

Help for the Holidays!

By Lisa Przybysz

The holidays are a family time of giving, sharing, and simply enjoying being together. As family caregivers and their elderly loved ones come together with their families, it can be a joyful time or a time of worry and added stress. These helpful tips and some sound advice will help families enjoy the holidays and find ways to reduce stress.

Things That Can Bring Family Holiday Joy:

The comfort of togetherness. A Place for Mom's Senior Living Blog article, "Why Visiting Loved Ones Keeps Them Young and Happy," highlights the following benefits of visiting an elderly loved one:

- Visits with family can help bring back positive memories.
- Visits help the elderly stay emotionally engaged.
- Visits remind your family that you love them.
- Visits help us create new memories for the future.

The holiday season may be the perfect time for family caregivers and extended family members to ask questions of their elderly loved ones. To discover greater understanding of who their elderly loved ones are today, and how past experiences helped to shape their lives. This sharing of one's life story can have positive impact on both the elderly person sharing her/his story and the members of their family for generations to come.

There are things that each elderly person in our lives have to share about themselves. This may include personal memories about themselves and different family members throughout their lives, their historical perspective, generations of traditions, and legacies they would like to leave. Kimberly Powell, Genealogy Expert, in the article, "50 Questions for Family History Interviews" recommends the following questions: "What world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family? How is the world today different from what it was like when you were a child?"

The holiday season brings the opportunity for distant relatives to come home and re-join the family once again. (If a family member is in the military and unable to come home they may be able to join the family briefly by Skype.)

Things That Add Family Holiday Stress:

The loss of a spouse or a loved one, financial burdens, and declining health, may cause depression. In the ABC News article, "Helping Seniors Beat the Holiday Blues," the American Geriatrics Society offers seniors the following tips to beat the blues during the holidays:

- Get out and about
- Volunteer
- Don't drink too much alcohol
- Accept and express your feelings
- Recognize the signs of depression

The following advice is given in the CBS News article, "Holidays Without Cheer," "Sadness is a response to an event, and is temporary. But if a person is very sad for more than a month and starts having problems with sleep, normal activities, appetite, maintaining their weight and so forth, then they are clinically depressed."

Encourage them to visit their healthcare provider if they show signs of clinical depression.

Talk to other family members about helping with transportation, shopping, baking, other holiday preparations, and one-on-one time with their elderly loved one.

Mark Hager, of Age In Place, offers the following help in his insightful blog article, "Holiday Survival Tips for Caregivers:"

- Have guests come to the home of the person you are caring for or your home if you provide care there.
- Have a potluck meal instead of having to cook everything yourself.
- Make sure your guests are aware of any limitations of the loved one you're caring for before they arrive.
- Ask for help and allow those who ask to help.
- Don't overcommit and try to do too much.
- Plan as much of it out ahead of time as you can.
- Take breaks. It's your holiday too!
- Create new traditions or build easier versions of the old ones.

Holidays don't have to be a hassle, or more things added to an already busy family caregiver's task list. Further, holidays needn't be singled out as lonely, sad, or depressing for an elderly loved one. There is help available for families to find relief and to enjoy the holiday season! There are numerous community resources available such as respite services, mental health services, home care services, and many more. Check out the Caregiver Resource Network website (www.Caregiverresource.net) for information on available local community resources to help you in your caregiving role.

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.