

# Partners in Care

By Lisa M. Petsche

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## All-Generation Celebrations

*Enjoy festive visits with a loved one in care*

How do you include, in holiday celebrations, a relative who resides in a retirement home or nursing home? The following suggestions can help make this time of the year more enjoyable for the whole family.

Set realistic expectations and be prepared to modify traditions. Include your relative in preparations to the best of their ability. Contributing in even small ways — such as signing greeting cards or helping to select gifts from a catalog — will make them feel valued and create a feeling of partnership.

Reminisce about past Christmases to help your relative get into the spirit of the season. Share special memories, bring in photo albums or favorite music, read aloud a favorite holiday story, or watch home movies or a classic holiday film.

Plan ahead and space out activities as much as possible, scheduling quiet days in between eventful ones.

## At Nursing and Retirement Homes

- Give staff at least a day's notice when you'd like to ensure your relative is up and ready for a special visit or other event.
- Visit when you are not rushed for time.
- Bring children or grandchildren with you. Ensure adult supervision at all times for youngsters.
- Decorate your relative's room using window clings, children's artwork, garland, a small nativity scene or a miniature Christmas tree.
- Bring in greeting cards received to share with your relative, and leave some behind.
- Bring homemade treats and take-out coffee or a thermal carafe of tea, and enjoy a holiday snack together. Consider supplying enough sweets for your relative to share with roommates or staff if they wish. Do check with nursing staff regarding dietary restrictions before you bring in anything.
  - Review the activities calendar to learn about scheduled holiday events — such as a visiting choir — and attend one of them with your relative.
  - Offer to accompany family members planning a first-time visit to the facility, to ease their anxiety.
  - Join your relative for Christmas dinner. Most facilities offer a midday meal with all the traditional holiday trimmings, and sell tickets to relatives and friends who would like to join residents. Another option is to hold a celebration in the family dining room or other private space that's available for booking; inquire about catering service.



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# All-Generation Celebrations (cont.)

## On Outings

- Before deciding to bring your relative home for a visit, determine their environmental needs — addressing accessibility and safety issues — as well as their care needs for the time period you have in mind. Run ideas by staff to see if they have concerns or suggestions. Even overnight visits may be feasible with assistance from family, friends or a privately contracted personal support worker.
- If feasible, take your relative home for an afternoon so they can participate in (or simply observe, depending on their abilities) holiday preparations such as baking, decorating or gift wrapping.
- If your home isn't accessible, take your relative out to the mall for gift shopping and lunch. Book accessible transportation if necessary. If they can get in and out of a car, take them out one evening for a holiday light tour.
- Ensure any destination is accessible, including its washroom facilities. If family members' homes aren't accessible, choose a restaurant or banquet hall that meets everyone's needs.
- Book accessible transportation well in advance, since use peaks during the holidays. Consider celebrating with your relative on a day other than Dec. 25 to increase the likelihood that the service will be able to accommodate them.
- Give staff plenty of notice of the date and pickup and estimated return times for your relative. This allows them sufficient time to make adjustments with food services and preparations with the pharmacy, as well as obtain a temporary leave of absence (TLA) order from the doctor.
- Prepare relatives and friends who haven't seen your relative in a while for any changes in their appearance, abilities or behavior.
- Ensure your relative has appropriate clothing on hand, including warm outerwear. Let staff know what you would like your relative to wear for an event if they're not able to communicate this.
- Take along any necessary medical equipment, supplies and medications.
- Videotape or photograph events your relative is not able to attend.