

Partners in Care

By Lisa M. Petsche

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Elders have a special role in holiday celebrations

The holiday season is a hectic time for many people, due to the preparations and festivities that typically take place. Staying sane, not to mention enjoying this special time of the year, is even more of a challenge for those raising a family — a labor-intensive role at the best of times.

Older relatives, who have many Holidayes under their belt and usually some time to spare, can be instrumental in making the season more meaningful and enjoyable for this younger generation and their offspring.

Given their early life experiences and the wisdom that comes with age, they are well-positioned, for example, to take a leadership role in taming Holiday commercialism — a concern shared by many of today's parents — and modeling environmental stewardship.

Elders are also the key to traditions, passing them along and perhaps also developing new ones. Traditions help solidify a family, giving it a unique identity that provides each member with feelings of belonging and security.

If you are a senior, read on for some ways to enhance your family's celebration of the season and create lasting memories.

Addressing stress

- Prepare extra batches of holiday treats and share them.
- Offer to baby-sit so parents can go shopping, or invite the grandkids over for an afternoon or evening so their parents can wrap gifts without interruption.
- Check the newspaper for special events suitable for families, such as choral shows, pageants and open skating sessions — especially those that are free or low-cost. Pass on details, or offer to take the grandkids to one of them.



Elders have a special role in holiday celebrations (cont.)

Gift giving

- Resist the urge to go overboard with gift giving. Limit the number and magnitude of gifts you give, and ensure equity.
- Suggest a new tradition of drawing names, giving family presents in lieu of individual gifts or buying only for the children.
- Run ideas by your kids before purchasing gifts for your grandchildren. Ask for suggestions to ensure your selections are age appropriate and compatible with individual needs and preferences, as well as the family's values.
- Consider alternatives to the usual store-bought stuff.

These include:

homemade food or handcrafted items; gifts of time, involving a service like babysitting or a talent such as hairstyling or photography; gifts of experience that allow the recipient to try something new, like a sport or a musical instrument, or an offer to teach a skill you possess, such as sewing or woodworking; gifts the whole family can enjoy together — for example, museum passes, a board game or a large jigsaw puzzle; and charitable donations in honor of loved ones. Let others know you'd welcome these types of gifts.

- Avoid products that are trendy, disposable, have limited use, require batteries or don't appear durable.
- Seek out gifts that promote good values.
- If you're not sure what to give, choose a gift certificate from the person's favorite place to shop or dine or a large department store or bookstore.
- For wrapping, choose reusable gift bags and boxes, or get creative and make the wrapping part of the gift — for example, a scarf or photo storage box. Leave oversized gifts unwrapped, hide them and provide clues on where to find them.

- Enlist your grandchildren's help in making gift tags from old Holiday cards.

Planning ahead

- Be sensitive to family members' competing obligations in terms of work schedules and holiday plans with in-laws. Don't make assumptions about availability or insist on certain dates, times or locations for family events, but rather negotiate plans that work for everyone.
- Be prepared to modify or forego traditions that are no longer practical. Recognize, too, that young parents may wish to start some family traditions of their own.
- Consider starting a new tradition — perhaps a tree decorating party at your home or a festive sing — along (obtain song books and easy-to-use musical instruments such as tambourines and maracas).

Quality time — fostering connections

- Take your grandchildren on a special outing — for example, a holiday light tour, attending a church bazaar, shopping for a special gift for their parents or purchasing gifts to donate to a toy drive.
- Invite the grandkids over for decorating or to watch a classic holiday movie.
- Attend grandchildren's school Holiday pageants or holiday recitals. -If applicable, invite your family to join you at your place of worship.
- Share cards, letters and photos you receive from relatives and family friends.
- Share family recipes for special dishes or sweets. Invite members over for a hands-on cooking or baking demonstration.
- Reminisce together about past holiday events. Bring out photo albums or play home movies.
- Share your recollections of childhood Holidays, including family customs, memorable gifts and touching or humorous moments.