

Tips for Helping a Loved One with Dementia at Family Gatherings

Alzheimer's and other dementia impact a person's ability to communicate, but that doesn't mean they can't be a part of social gatherings. When planning an event, use the following tips for considering these individuals' needs and wants and finding ways everyone can play a part.

- Assign one guest to keep an eye on your family member, or take turns ensuring they're involved and their unique needs are being met.
- Find out what makes them happy. For instance, they may enjoy singing, so start a family sing-along after dinner.
- Use a family photo album to spark a conversation reminiscing about previous holidays.
- Invite the person to participate in a non-verbal way, perhaps by helping set the table or fold napkins, depending on his or her level of function.
- Be sensitive to their needs. Being seated in the middle of a noisy crowd or in the path of active children may overwhelm them. One-on-one conversations may be more comfortable.
- For some people, just sitting together, observing others at the gathering, may be enough.
- Consider avoiding conversations around current events as it may be troubling for someone with short-term memory loss.
- Try not to correct people with dementia, who may say things that are inaccurate, or confront them for being repetitious.
- Be a good and patient listener, because some people may need longer to formulate their responses to questions.
- If they become distressed, redirect them by changing the topic or invite someone else to join your conversation.
- Provide a quiet place where the person can spend some down time if needed.
- Consider holding the holiday meal at brunch or lunch, because some people with dementia experience fatigue or confusion later in the day.

- Keep your sense of humor, which lightens the mood for everyone and can ease communications.
- Watch for behavioral triggers. A person may try to get up and leave, which may mean they need a drink or to go to the bathroom, or perhaps they feel anxious or over-stimulated because the noise level is too loud.
- Consider what's appropriate for their level of ability. If someone is in advanced stages of dementia and not able to follow a conversation, try going for a walk instead.
- Keep in mind that a specific tip or strategy that doesn't work one day may well work the next.

Read more about engaging someone with dementia to be a part of your holidays:

["Helping a Loved One with Dementia at Family Gatherings,"](#) by Patricia Corrigan