

The Holidays and Dementia



The holidays are often filled with opportunities for togetherness, sharing, laughter and memories. But they can also bring stress, disappointment and sadness. A person living with dementia may feel a special sense of loss during the holidays because of the changes he or she has experienced.

As the 2020 holiday season draws closer, the current COVID-19 pandemic creates unique circumstances in the delivery of care in long-term care communities. We recognize that the pandemic has forced us to alter our normal routines, and may also impact annual holiday traditions.

A holiday is still a holiday whether it is celebrated at home, at a care facility, or through the use of technology. Here are some ways to help families celebrate together and from a distance:

- Depending on the most recent visiting restrictions, **allow one or two people to visit at a time** so maybe a handful of family members could schedule multiple, separate visits spread out over the holidays.
- If it's medically possible, **provide the opportunity for residents to be taken out of the facility** for small family gatherings. Make sure to communicate that they will be expected to quarantine when they return to the facility.
- Taking into consideration the resident's cognitive and functional abilities, the family could put together a series of **care packages** with (holiday-themed) activities, picture albums and treats and send them every so often throughout the holidays. Sending the packages January-April may be especially important for them to feel the love as outside visits won't be possible in many locations, and the "special" activities and decorations will be absent. It will likely be a time when deep depression, agitation and other challenging responses may appear more frequently.
- If families are interested, have them drop off a package of **holiday decorations** that staff could help put up in the residents' rooms.
- Encourage the family to **purchase an Echo Show** to do drop in video calls.
- Staff could assist residents with setting up a **live stream of the worship services** at the resident's home church that can then be viewed in their room on a TV or computer.
- Encourage family and friends to **sing holiday carols outside of the facility**, going window to window while they sing.