

Taking Care!

Help An Older Relative Really Enjoy The Holidays!

By Lisa M. Petsche – lmepetsche@gmail.com

Many people are filled with joyful anticipation and festive good cheer right now. But some are apprehensive and may also experience heightened feelings of loneliness as Christmas approaches. Or perhaps they feel empty inside.

This type of reaction is commonly referred to as the holiday blues.

Older adults are particularly susceptible because they're more likely to experience losses, such as a spouse or other companion, a long-time home, financial security or health and the physical functioning and independence associated with it. As a result, they're not able to celebrate the holidays the way they always have.

Feelings of grief may include sadness, frustration, anger and anxiety – emotions that sap energy and create stress.

Fortunately, there are many things that relatives can do to help seniors in this situation experience enjoyment during the holiday season.

If you have a family member who is widowed or living with illness or disability, read on for ideas to lift their spirits and lighten their load.



**Lisa
Petsche**

Addressing Stress

- Bake extra holiday treats to share with the person.
- Offer to help decorate, wrap gifts, address greeting cards and take them to the post office or perform other holiday-related tasks.
- Take your relative out to the mall for shopping and lunch. Arrange accessible transportation if necessary.
- Let them know when you are heading to the grocery store or on other errands, and ask what you can drop off or pick up to make things easier.
- If they don't drive, offer transportation so they can get to a hair appointment, do banking or attend a seasonal event.

Giving Gifts

- Resist the urge to go overboard with gifting, so the person doesn't feel the need to reciprocate.
- Ask, rather than guess, what kind of gifts your relative would prefer. Practical presents, such as grocery store or pharmacy gift cards, toiletries, easy-care clothing, home safety equipment and adaptive aids, may be most appreciated.
- Consider, too, gifts of time and talent. Create a book of IOUs for home-cooked meals, baked goods, household chores or repairs, yard work, chauffeuring, running errands or teaching a skill such as computers.

Planning Ahead

- Be prepared to modify or forego traditions that aren't practical for your relative, such as a late-night gathering or an event at their home. It may be time to start a new ritual; brainstorm ideas with other family members.
- Be sensitive to your relative's healthcare needs when considering the time period for a family event. Before deciding on a venue, determine their environmental needs, addressing accessibility and safety issues.
- Encourage them to take things one day at a time and to ensure plenty of time for self-care.

Staying Connected

- The following are some ideas for spending quality time together and creating lasting memories.
- Invite your relative over for a baking or tree decorating party or to watch a favorite holiday movie.
- Invite them to your grandchildren's school's holiday variety show, a church Christmas pageant or a holiday recital, and provide transportation.
- Take them out to a concert or theater production. Or go on a holiday light tour, followed by dessert at a cafe.
- Invite them to share recipes for special dishes or sweets. Offer to coordinate a cooking or baking demonstration. Even if they're not physically able to participate, they can still provide instruction and supervision.
- If applicable, ask your relative to join your family in attending a worship service.
- Invite them to sleep over so they can partake in Christmas morning traditions in your household.
- Encourage them to reminisce about holidays from their youth, including family customs, special people and places, memorable gifts and touching or humorous moments.

Lisa M. Petsche is a social worker and freelance writer specializing in seniors' health and wellness.



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