

Caregivers' Support Group Help for the Holidays

We are bringing back this "oldie but goodie" article, by request.

The holidays can be a stressful time for everyone. However, with the daily challenges that Caregivers face, it is important to have a plan for coping with the added stresses of the holidays. When we look back on past memorable holidays, what matters most are the memories that we make and time together with loved ones. Let this be the focus of your holidays. Please view some of the tips below that several experts have suggested to help Caregivers get through the holiday season.

Simplify Your Traditions

We all have traditions that make the holidays special. Decide which of these are most important to you and your loved one. Keep these and let the others go. Simplify your traditions. Keep an open mind to ways that you can make the workload easier. For instance, use paper plates instead of dinnerware. Consider hiring help to assist with housework. Make new traditions. Remember that the important thing is creating warm memories and having time with your loved ones. Anything that creates an atmosphere for this, can be a wonderful new tradition.

Recognize the Signs of Stress and Burnout

We all can reach our "burnout point" when dealing with extreme stress. However, if we stay observant for the signs of stress, it can help us deal with it before we are at the burnout point. Some of these signs of stress are: emotional ups and downs, becoming more fatigued, and foggy thinking.

Another sign of stress is the inability to sit still or the opposite feeling of being "frozen" and unable to do anything. So what can we do to reduce our stress?

Mind Your Own Mind-Set

One effective tool for controlling stress is taking control of our thoughts and what we focus on. Acknowledge all your emotions. Emotions are normal and can help us gauge our stress level. Focus on the moment and what you **can** do. Steer your mind to the **Positive** – Remember Negative Thinking activates the body's stress response!

Plan Ahead and Focus on What is MOST Important

Focus on making memories of time with your loved one. Include your loved one on activities that he or she can still participate in. Play Christmas music or other holiday music that you and your loved one have enjoyed in the past. Bring out photo albums and share these with your loved one. Make New Traditions – that are meaningful to you now.

Keep Self-Care to the Top of the List

It is so easy to let your own care drop to the bottom of the list. This is a pitfall that many Caregivers fall into. But it is a dangerous one! This will place your own health at risk. You cannot continue to care for your loved one if you are ill. The following Self Care Steps are essential for your own health and well-being: Getting exercise – even short periods of this can be helpful. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, or visualization are great stress relievers, too. Using lavender or citrus essential oils are also relaxing. These essential oils can be applied directly to your pulse points, or they can be diffused in the air. A very important self-care measure is sleep – Make this a priority as a lack of sleep will negatively affect everything. Focus on eating healthy foods, avoiding high sugars and alcohol (alcohol is a depressant). Trade in your hot beverage for Herbal Tea. Chamomile teas help with relaxation and sleep. Citrus and peppermint teas are mood lifters. Get outside! Sunshine increases Vitamin D levels. If you

have seasonal depression, talk to your doctor. You may need to use special lighting to treat this.

Know Your Own Best Stress Outlet

A Stress Outlet is an activity that helps relieve stress. Some common Stress Outlets are: writing in a journal, laughing at a funny movie, talking with a friend or going for a walk. What helps you de-stress? What gives you joy? It is essential that you find time to do these activities.

Connect With Support

We were never meant to get through our struggles alone. Staying connected with others who you can offer a listening ear and words of encouragement is so important. Churches and Bible study groups can provide tremendous support. Online message boards or hotlines (such as found on the Alzheimer's website) can help when it is difficult to leave home. See www.alzheimers-illinois.org or call their hotline at 1-800-272-3900. Sessions with a social worker, counselor or therapist can be a great way to vent your frustrations and get more ideas for coping. Join a Support Group. **The Friendship Center** has a **Caregivers' Support Group** that **meets the 2nd Wednesday of every month at 1:00 PM at St John's Lutheran Church. November 14, 2018 and December 12, 2018 are our next meetings.** We would love to have you join us!

Seek Out Spiritual Comfort

Playing Christmas music or spiritual music throughout the home can lighten moods and the atmosphere of your home and lift everyone's spirits. Attend church services (or if housebound – request CDs of the service or view television services). Devotions can be a great comfort and there are many types available to fit what you most need. Comforting Bible verses can be found by using your Bible's concordance and looking up the

topic you are most needing. You can find websites that list comforting Bible verses by doing an online search using "comforting bible verses" in the search engine. Prayer – both personal and requesting prayer from others can bring much comfort.

Ask for Help for Yourself and Your Loved One

Asking for help can be difficult for us to do. However, it is so necessary when you are facing additional stresses of holiday preparations on top of your caregiving duties. Allow yourself to ask for help for holiday preparations, household chores or personal matters. Consider hiring someone. Suggest gifts of time or chore assistance in lieu of gifts. Take advantage of Respite Care or a Paid Caregiver. Adult Day Cares such as the **Friendship Center** are a great source to add socialization for your loved one and give you a break from your caregiving duties. Contact the **Friendship Center** at **815-369-2690** to find out more about our services.

We hope this guide will help you get through the Holiday season and the time afterward. Please remember that we are also available to help provide assistance and support.

Happy Thanksgiving! Merry Christmas! Happy New Year!
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