

Bring the Hospitality with You

Tips for Visiting a Loved One in a Nursing Home

(ARA) - Sometimes, all it takes to bring a smile to your face or to brighten your day is a visit with a dear friend or family member. Even though some things change when a loved one moves to a nursing home or care facility, other things -- like love, compassion, and the need for human interaction -- stay the same.

Visits with your loved one are very important. Eldercare leader Beverly Healthcare recommends you consider the following tips to make your visits an enjoyable experience for everyone.

Get Comfortable with Your Surroundings

You'll probably see, hear and smell new things when you first visit a nursing home. It takes time to feel at ease in an unfamiliar setting so prepare yourself for your visit. Skilled nursing facilities are home to many different people. Some people may need to use wheelchairs or walkers while others may look the picture of health, but may actually have trouble with their memory. Remember that people are unique and have different experiences, and this applies to all those who live in the nursing home.

Just as your house may fill with the noise of your family, a nursing home and its residents and staff make their own sounds. You may hear beepers, alarms and telephones -- as well as laughter, talking and even yelling. There are many people who call the nursing home "home," so think of it as a house full of people, each with a special voice and distinct sound.

Several activities can take place at once in a nursing home and you may smell different things, all at the same time. You might catch the scent of cleaning solutions or air fresheners, cooking from the kitchen and maybe even unpleasant body odors. If the smells bother you, consider moving your visits outdoors if your loved one is able or try sitting in a low-traffic area.

Don't Forget Your Manners

Consider your visit to a nursing home the same as you would a visit to your loved one's home. Although you might sometimes drop by a friend's house unannounced, it is always best to arrange your visits to a nursing home in advance. Call to ask when it is best to visit. Consider that your loved one may have more energy for a visit at a certain time of day. Use good judgment and try not to plan your visit when you might interfere with rest periods or treatment schedules. Don't forget to check the visiting hours schedule with the staff.

When you visit someone's home, you knock on the door or ring the bell. Do the same at the door to your loved one's room and be sure to ask permission before entering. If your

loved one can't respond or acknowledge you, be sure to announce yourself before entering his or her room.

Your visits do not have to last hours or involve a lot of activity. Sometimes shorter and more frequent visits can be as fulfilling as longer ones. Activities like opening the mail together or sharing a snack can sometimes be just enough. Promising to visit and not following through can be very disappointing for someone living in a nursing home, so call ahead if you are unable to make a scheduled visit and immediately plan a time to reschedule.

“Can I Come?”

Children are full of energy and laughter and their liveliness can be a wonderful change of pace for someone living in a nursing home. According to the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living, studies show that elderly people enjoy seeing children at parties and public activities.

Before you visit, talk to your child or teenager about what to expect. Let him or her know that it is normal to feel nervous. Bring along activities that can help occupy young children if necessary, like books or a puzzle. Try to arrange the length of your visit based on the age of the child. Normally, the younger the child, the shorter you should keep your visits.

During visits, encourage children and your family member or friend to play simple games together like cards or checkers, or to sit and chat about daily activities. Time spent with an elderly loved one helps him or her feel involved in the family, and in turn, helps children learn about the elderly person's role in the family. Visits can even bring history to life through stories of “when I was young.”

Items of Interest

You may feel stress about what to talk about or what to do during your visit. To help alleviate those feelings, arrange some activities ahead of time. Put together a bag of items to take with you that includes things like magazines, cards, music to listen to, hand lotion, craft items to work on or pictures to share. Change the items around every so often. Offer to help write letters or just sit and share stories about family and friends. If a loved one is unable to communicate with you, your presence is still important. Sitting and holding hands can be a welcome activity.

Get to Know the Staff

Nursing home staff members are there to help care for your loved one and to promote a healthy environment. Consider the staff to be part of the “household.” They work to get to know and understand your loved one. Try to do the same with them. Talk with and visit them, too. Show your appreciation for their assistance by sending them a note of thanks or offering kind words.

Keep staff informed and ask them questions. If you plan to be out of town, let the staff know and provide them with contact information. If you would like to bring snacks or special treats for your loved one to enjoy, check with the staff first for any special dietary restrictions that may apply.

Nursing homes can provide you with assistance. Many homes have family associations or family councils that you can join. These groups made up of family members of residents and a representative from the home, offer support and help to enhance the quality of life for those who live in the facility. Group members often get together to host welcome visits for families of new residents or organize clean-up events for the facility. Groups can also serve as support systems and a source of information to families of new residents.

Sharing time with a loved one is always important, especially when your loved one is a resident of a nursing home. Take the time to prepare for your visits -- it can make all the difference to you and your loved one.

For more information and tips on visiting a nursing homes or care facilities visit:

* The American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living at www.longtermcareliving.com

* The IDEAS Institute at www.ideasinstitute.org.

If you would like more information about Beverly Healthcare and its services, please visit www.beverlycares.com.

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