

Freedom *focus*

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INSIDE



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Planning a Successful Holiday Celebration

There's no denying the twinkle lights and candles, holiday season is upon us! Some of you may love the hustle and bustle the season brings, but many caregivers can find this time of year especially trying. It's no wonder the holidays can be stressful for caregivers like you - many people living with developmental disabilities, dementia, or other cognitive challenges can find holiday celebrations overstimulating.

If you are taking your loved one to a holiday event or gathering, you may be worried the event will be unpleasant for them. The change in the routine,

the flashing lights or decorations, and the loud environment can cause behaviors that will make both of you uncomfortable.

This season, try keeping your celebrations low-key. Arrive at the beginning of the event, before it gets too crowded, and leave before your loved one shows signs of distress. Ask for music to be kept low while your loved one is there, and don't be afraid to escape to a quiet room for a quick reset during the festivities.

Discover a few ways to make the holidays a more pleasant sensory experience in this newsletter, as well as signs of potential stress from your loved one.

Sending you and your loved one holiday cheer from FreedomCare!



Attention Caregivers!

Caregiving during the holidays can be challenging, but you can find joy by simplifying your celebrations this year.



Sensory Stimulation Benefits & Inspiration

People living with dementia, developmental disabilities, PTSD, anxiety, or other cognitive challenges can feel overwhelmed when environments are too loud, too bright, or too busy.

This is called sensory overstimulation, and can cause behaviors like yelling, repetitive questions, or even physical aggression.

However, when done correctly, stimulating multiple senses can have a calming effect. You can create these interactions at home with your loved one, using items already in cabinets or drawers. Here are a few sensory kit ideas to give you inspiration for your next calming interaction together.



HAND MASSAGES

Your loved one will feel peaceful and calm when you take time to stimulate the senses of touch, smell, and hearing. Use a scented lotion (lavender works well, but a holiday scent can evoke lovely memories and feelings as well) and turn on favorite relaxing music. Use the lotion to give your loved one a soft hand massage. Don't be surprised if they nod off for a quick snooze after the interaction!



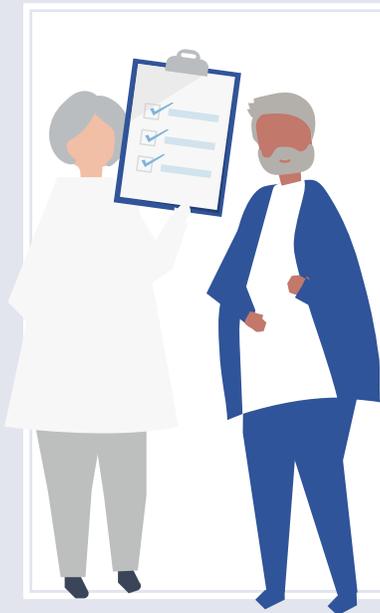
HOLIDAY BAKING

Stimulate, and make, memories by tapping into a few of the most powerful senses - smell and taste. Pull out spices from the cabinet that are tied to holiday favorites in your family: cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, vanilla, etc. One by one, smell the spices and talk about what each remind you of. If your loved one doesn't speak, don't worry - you can do the talking to enhance the experience. Hold cookie cutters and trace the shapes with their fingers. You can also taste a sweet treat together.



LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW

New Yorkers are used to the snow and ice that winter throws at us. You can tap into the magic and coziness of a snowstorm with your loved one using snowglobes you find at home or in a tourist gift shop. Shake the globes together and listen to the music after winding the key. You can listen to classical or favorite music as well to add to the experience.



Early Signs of Dementia

The holiday season means lots of family visits, which can give you insight into how your loved ones are doing. For many people visiting older family members, the holidays can be a time when they begin to wonder if the forgetfulness they noticed is normal or the sign of a problem.

It is important to know that forgetfulness or confusion is NOT a normal sign of aging. However, it is common for all of us to forget things every once in a while. (Have you ever wandered in a room and forgotten the reason?) Dementia is a progressive disease, which means it will continue to get worse over time.

Early signs of dementia can include:

Disorientation To Time

If your loved one isn't quite sure what year it is, or if they refer to you as someone from an older generation, it is worth getting them to the physician. For example, if your grandmother calls you by your grandfather's name, that could indicate a problem - if your grandmother calls you by your brother's name, it is probably not an issue.

Disruption To Daily Life

If your older loved one is having confusion or memory issues that disrupt their daily life, it is time to visit the doctor. For example, if your dad doesn't eat breakfast because he cannot perform the steps to make his coffee and oatmeal, it could indicate a problem.

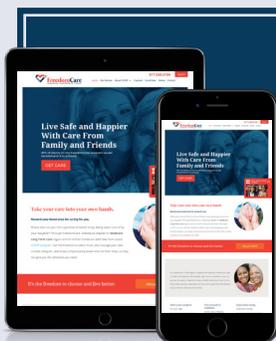
Poor Hygiene

Surprisingly, your loved one's hygiene can give you one of the best glimpses into their memory. If your loved one appears messy or disheveled, if they are wearing the same clothes day after day, or if they are unshaven or unkempt, it could indicate a cognition concern.

Communication Concerns

Participating in a conversation requires a lot of brain activity and attention. If your loved one is struggling to keep up with the conversation, or if they are having difficulties finding words, it could indicate a problem.

If you are concerned about your loved one's memory, make an appointment with their primary physician to have it checked out.



Take advantage of online support group & resources in your area:

- <https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving>
- <http://www.nyscr.org/resources-for-caregivers>

Connecting to people going through similar caregiving challenges can be great for your emotional & physical health!

Are you interested in joining a FreedomCare support group from the comfort of your home? We will soon launch a few of these groups and would love to hear from you if you are interested! Email supportgroups@freedomcareny.com.

Caregiver Bonus Program

Refer a friend to FreedomCare & get a

\$100 BONUS

once the patient starts receiving care!

Potential Signs of Stress

If your loved one does not speak, or does not speak often, it can feel difficult to communicate with them at times. Even the most verbal people can clam up in situations that feel overwhelming or busy. If you are able to notice potential signs of distress in your loved one, you are more likely to be able to get them out of the situation quicker, and without any resulting negative behaviors.



If you notice any of these potential signs of anxiety, go to a quiet area with your loved one for a calm interaction. You can determine your next steps together.

Watch for verbal and nonverbal cues that could indicate distress like:

- 1 Hand wringing or fidgeting
- 2 Avoiding eye contact
- 3 Pacing or rocking back and forth
- 4 Repetitive hand movements
- 5 Saying the same words over and over
- 6 Looking around for doors or exits
- 7 Complaining of a headache or other pain
- 8 Rubbing their eyes or head
- 9 Avoiding contact with you, or clinging closely to you