



Senior Series

*The Ohio
Department of
Aging*



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SS-188-01

Tips When Visiting a Nursing Home

Once a family member has moved to a nursing home, it is important to visit as often as time allows. Residents of nursing facilities need to be reassured on a regular basis that they are still an important member of the family. The following list of ideas may help you to provide care and support to your loved one during your visits to see them.

- When you visit, be supportive and affectionate. Personal contact with others is extremely important and many times the only touch older adults living in a facility experience is when they are dressed or bathed. Residents in nursing homes need to know they are loved and not forgotten. If they are receptive, hold their hand, give them hugs when you arrive and leave, and give them eye contact when they are talking to you. It is important to try to ignore any distracting smells or noises so as not to upset your loved one.
- Ask permission to visit and then plan your visits in advance. First, it is important to enable your family member to retain as much control in his or her life as possible. By asking their permission to visit, you are enabling your loved one to have control over at least one aspect of their schedule. Because there are two parts to a visit (looking forward to the visit, and the visit itself), plan your visits ahead of time rather than just dropping by. Planning ahead allows a resident the enjoyment of anticipating your visit.
- Listen attentively to your loved one. Do not dominate the conversation or talk "at" them. Even if you have heard the story before, being a good listener allows them to enjoy their memories or current thoughts by sharing them with you.
- Speak to all residents as adults, not as children. The use of the term "we" instead of "you," for example, robs a person of his or her identity. "How are we this morning?" is patronizing to many listeners. Treating older adults like children, even if they are frail or cognitively impaired, only contributes

to low self-esteem and increased dependence.

- When you visit, share news about your life and your family and don't forget the photo album! Do not spend the entire visit asking them questions about how they feel or if they have eaten. Instead, share funny stories or talk about a big decision you have made. Make sure to tell your loved one about trivial events, too. Even little details can be important and make elders feel included.
- Bring your children to visit your loved one to encourage a relationship between them. These visits can also be "teachable moments" parents use to explain the aging process and how older persons also need love and affection. Parents will be providing an example of the importance of caring for our elders by making visits a priority. In addition, bring a few of the children's art projects as gifts to brighten your loved one's room.
- While you are visiting, make a point to say "hello" to other residents who may not receive many visitors. Becoming familiar with others who live in the facility not only brightens their day, but also enables you to observe the care of other residents.
- If their health and mobility permits, and with the approval of the medical staff, take your family member out of the nursing home for a day. Take him or her to lunch or for ice cream, to watch a parade, to get her hair done or to get him a shave, for a drive in the country, or include them in a family get together. The activity and the sights and sounds of other people may lift their spirits and provide them with a new and wonderful memory.
- Become acquainted with nursing home staff. Your active involvement and consistent visits illustrate your interest in your loved one as well as an appreciation of the care they provide. Do not hesitate to thank the staff or compliment something they have done well.
- If you are unable to visit your loved one in person, due to distance or your own health limitations, be sure to keep in touch by telephone or by sending notes and cards. Receiving pictures of you, your garden, or your pet could brighten your family members' day and provide them with something to enjoy for days afterward.

Author: Christine A. Price, Ph.D., OSU Extension State Specialist, Gerontology, Department of Human Development and Family Science.

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