

HOME **FOR THE** HOLIDAYS



5 Tips for Celebrating the Holidays With Your Loved One Who Has Dementia

The holiday season is a time for gathering, reminiscing, and sharing joyful moments. But when a loved one has dementia, celebrating together can require a little extra care and planning. With thoughtful preparation, you can create meaningful, comforting experiences that bring joy to everyone involved. Here are five practical tips to help you celebrate the holidays with your loved one who has dementia, keeping their comfort and well-being at the heart of your family traditions.

1. Avoid New Experiences.

Old traditions and long-term memory are much more readily accessible for people with memory loss, so it is often more successful to avoid new or unfamiliar experiences. Fortunately, the holidays are ripe with tradition—it's a great time to tell old stories, watch home movies, and celebrate traditions passed down across generations.

2. Noise and commotion may cause stress.

Music is enjoyable—but for background music, use only quiet instrumentals. If you want to listen to upbeat music with singing, have that be all that is happening because sometimes it is too hard for people to handle that and other stimulation. Use caution with TV and movies, as these may have unforeseen upsetting noise or commotion. If kids are running around and playing, monitor your loved one for signs of becoming agitated or overwhelmed.

3. Help others try to simplify communication.

Encourage the use of step-by-step instructions, try not to end sentences with a question, not all talk at once, and not ask questions that rely on memory. When offering choices, show the options visually as well instead of relying on auditory comprehension alone.

4. Prepare kids as best you can within their ability to comprehend.

Kids are pretty great at being accepting. But if your loved one struggles with paranoia or suspicion, it's good to make others aware that they might accuse someone of stealing or lying. Kids can find this upsetting, so it is good to prepare them by explaining why this is happening to your loved one's memory and that it's okay to go along with it, even if it isn't true. Kids need extra help understanding these concepts.

5. Include your loved one in a way where they can contribute purposefully.

Giving them a useful role with an achievable task will be both pleasantly distracting and mood-elevating. Wrapping gifts, creating floral arrangements, sweeping the porch, reading to children, sorting silverware, folding napkins, stirring ingredients...the more useful and pleasant the activity, the better.

“ It is ok to decide not to include a loved one when it feels like it will be too stressful. Many people opt to have a quiet small visit at the person's home and let go of bringing them to family celebrations because it has become too difficult. Try to give yourself grace doing what works for both you and your loved one. ”

--Diana Engle, Vice President of Health and Wellness, MBK Senior Living

Celebrating the holidays with a loved one who has dementia may take some adjustments, but with care and mindfulness, these moments can be deeply meaningful for everyone. By embracing familiar traditions, creating a calm environment, and fostering purposeful involvement, you can help your loved one feel safe, included, and valued. Remember, the heart of the holidays is connection, and even small acts of love and patience can make this season truly special for you and your family.

