



Holiday Season, Chaos or Comfort Planning Ahead When Caring for Parents or Spouse

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No, it's not too early, advance planning is a must!

You may not be thinking of the festive season yet but don't leave it too late if you are a family caregiver for mom and/or dad or your spouse. There's a lot to keep in mind when managing care through the holiday season. Whether they are living in residential long-term care or at home, making sure they're happy while carving out a little time for yourself is essential.

When I think back to when my parents were alive Christmas over their last few years was chaotic. It could be a logistical nightmare. We were invited to celebrate our traditional Christmas Eve dinner with my brother and his growing family. I didn't want to leave out either parent and they lived at opposite ends of the city with my brother in another direction. Think of a pinwheel. Planning started well in advance, even though they lived in residential care.

Strategizing Supports in Advance

Asking for help can be daunting for a family caregiver if you don't want to impose on others or you just don't know how to ask, or know who to call. Building a support network of friends and family you can count on, or having a list of services available will pay off when you really need help. You might need a couple of hours to finish your holiday shopping or go to the doctor or you need someone to look after Mom or Dad overnight. Some of your supports might prefer to do short stints maybe an hour or two max and no driving while others are happy to drive them to an appointment and maybe even prepare a meal for them.

When asking for support from health authority and other service providers you need to give them lots of lead time.

Here's a list of to do's when parents are still at home but need more support.

1. Call your local health authority intake line well in advance to see if your parent or parents qualify for home support. If they already have a case manager give yourself at least two months' lead time to set planning in motion for additional support over the holidays.
2. Ask your case manager about respite care for a few days, a week, or two.
3. Adult daycare centres may be available in your neighbourhood and referred by the health authority.
4. Check for volunteer services through your local health authority for transport to and from medical appointments. Consider non-driving community volunteers or care companies to accompany by taxi.
5. Some service clubs and NGO's offer driving support such as the Canadian Cancer Society and or the Free Masons. There are wheel chair transport companies that escort into the office or into the home.
6. If, they are a veteran and have applied for support from Veterans Affairs there may be additional help available at this time of year.

7. For nonmedical companion care, consider family, friends, neighbours, someone from your church, or a caregiving company. If a friend or neighbour you trust randomly offers to help, don't say no, and if you don't need them right away ask if you can call for help another time.
8. Consider who might be comfortable tending to personal care needs and navigating a wheelchair and a walker in small spaces such as bathrooms, busy living rooms, dining rooms and around Christmas trees.
9. Having empathy for your loved one is important, you want to help maintain their dignity in what might be a very busy atmosphere. Remember they may be going through their own anxieties but don't want to say.

Here are tasks you may need to coordinate for mom/ dad or your spouse if they are in a care home.

1. Shop for new clothes or shoes
2. Give the home at least a weeks' notice to ensure time to have clothes back from laundry if needed.
3. Let the nurse know what time you are leaving so they can prepare meds in advance for the evening out
4. Advance plan for showers, hairdo's and manicures or nails clipped or plan for your private companion/caregiver to help you with these tasks.
5. Pack emergency bag of personal care items such as, extra underwear, change of pants and socks, extra hearing aid batteries.
6. Make sure the hearing aides are clean and in good working order.
7. Decide what will be easiest to manage, walker, cane or wheelchair, make sure they are clean and in good working order.
8. Ask the host what the menu plan is to ensure there are soft vegetables if necessary or other easy food items available that won't upset the stomach or be a problem with (ill fitting) dentures.
9. Arrange who will pick them up from their respective care homes, or take them back home? Know that they may not have the stamina to stay late so you may have to leave earlier than you would like.
10. Consider the weather and the safety of navigating from the car to the house and back.
11. Let the care home know when you plan to come back. They may have a timed lock on the front door and you may have to wait outside until someone sees you on the monitor.

Later you may decide it is much easier on your loved one and you to bring the family to the care home. Book the private dining room in advance to have a special meal ordered in or from the kitchen under less hectic circumstances.

Once you are organized, I trust your holiday will be calm as you care for your parents. Cherish your loved ones who have lost their independence. Take deep breaths, relish small pleasures, and learn how to ask for help.

...with care, integrity and heart in mind for you.

Barb

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