



Dignity in Dementia

Helping you support people with dementia



Whilst Christmas can be a wonderful time for people living with dementia, who feel comforted by the traditions and family rituals, it can also be overwhelming for some. This year because of Coronavirus it will inevitably feel different.

If the person with dementia that you care for has already struggled to make sense of the changes COVID has brought, Christmas could add even more confusion. Therefore it's worth starting to think about how you can make it as engaging, enjoyable and peaceful as possible for them.

Here are some of our thoughts and ideas:

- Sensory overload can be a major issue for people with dementia and can lead to anxiety and distress. Therefore going Christmas shopping may be problematic, especially this year with restrictions in shops and potential queuing to get in. If possible we suggest that you involve your relative with dementia in the choosing of gifts by showing them items in catalogues, or on the internet instead. Then if you aren't able to order them yourself, ask a relative or friend to purchase them for you (you'll obviously need to pay them).
- Eyesight can be affected as dementia progresses and so you need to take account of this when doing any activity. It's best to place yourself in front of your relative and at their eye level. In this way they are more likely to see you and what you doing.



- Making the Christmas cake, puddings and mince pies with someone with dementia is a great way to help them feel included and valued. Using their recipes and talking about how important they are to the family may also bring them great joy. Those in the earlier stage may well be able to get fully involved with your help and assistance. Those whose dementia is more advanced are likely to appreciate being asked to stir the cake or to put the mincemeat in pastry cases.

Decorating the cake and using decorations that have been in the family for ages, is a great opportunity to reminisce about past Christmas'. Try to stay relaxed throughout and remember it's not about what the end product looks like, but feeling connected and enjoying the moment.

- Making paper chains, cards and simple decorations together is a great rainy day activity for the run up to Christmas. Again remember to be patient and work at a pace that is comfortable for the person with dementia. Break down the activity into easy steps and use simple language when explaining or demonstrating what to do.
- Singing and music go hand-in-hand with Christmas. Unfortunately Carol Services this year are unlikely to go ahead in the usual way, but you can still sing at home. Why not put on a CD or download Christmas music and join in.

Language skills can be affected as dementia progresses but people who have difficulties with verbal communication can still sing along to music they know well. Singing is likely to lift their mood and make them feel happy and connected. Therefore we definitely recommend you search out Christmas Carols or Christmas songs and sing along to them. You can also use them as a distraction, when you can see that the person you care for is becoming frustrated or agitated.

- Decorating the tree is another good activity, especially if there are special decorations with special meanings that can bring back lots of memories. Play Christmas music whilst you're doing it, and maybe have a sherry or a glass of mulled wine.
- This Christmas Day may well feel different, especially if as a family you've decided not to see each other in person. However as far as is possible, try to stick to your traditional Christmas routines. Open presents at your usual time and if it's possible to see family on-line via Facetime or zoom open them





in front of them (we appreciate that's unlikely to have been part of your usual routine.) Eat your usual food and do as many of your usual Christmas day activities as you can e.g. if watching the Queen is a ritual make sure to do it again this year. That way you're likely to rekindle old Christmas memories and help to make this year special - be it in a different way.

- If you are taking advantage of the Government's relaxing of the rules over Christmas and you will be spending it with family or friends, make sure there is a quiet and comfortable space that your relative can go to escape the hustle and bustle. It may be nice for just one other person to join them for a gentle chat, so that they don't feel forgotten.
- When serving lunch, we suggest that you plate it up for your relative with dementia, as negotiating serving dishes can be difficult and may lead to anxiety and confusion. Also make sure you place their plate on the table where they can see it. Because of the likely deterioration in their eyesight, a little further towards the centre of the table is best. Also using a plain coloured plate, such as a blue one encourages eating. Don't fill their plate up with too much food as appetites diminish with age.

Other things to think about:

- The run-up to Christmas can be a stressful time for us all and so it's really important that family carers find some time for themselves. If it's possible, doing something just for you can be rejuvenating, but failing that a short walk or even 5 minutes on your own in a quiet space can help release your tension.
- Don't forget to order repeat prescriptions early so you aren't caught out over the holiday period.

We really hope that despite Coronavirus you have an enjoyable and peaceful Christmas.

With very best wishes from all at
Dignity in Dementia.

www.dignityindementia.org

