

Handout from the December 2025 Zoom talk by Karen Tyrell, CPCA, CDCP  
**Dementia Care Tips for the Holidays**



**Before the Visit:**

- 1. Plan Ahead:** Choose a time of day when your loved one is usually more alert and comfortable.
- 2. Bring Familiar Items:** Consider bringing familiar holiday decorations, photos, or music that might spark happy memories without being overwhelming.
- 3. Set Realistic Expectations:** Understand that their memory or responses might not be the same as before.

**During the Visit:**

- 1. Keep it Calm:** Create a peaceful environment. Loud noises and busy activities can be overstimulating. You may need to reduce the people in the room.
- 2. Engage with Simple Familiar Activities:** singing carols, enjoying a holiday treat together, looking at old photos and reminiscing. "I remember the Christmas where Uncle Joe played Santa!"
- 3. Involve Them Somehow in the Celebration:** Asking them to "help" with small tasks. (i.e. hanging an ornament or choosing a carol to sing.)
- 4. Go With the Flow:** If disengaged, gently redirect the conversation or continue to reminisce on your own. If confused with an activity, avoid correcting them or insisting on accuracy.

**After the Visit:**

- 1. Debrief with Staff:** Check to understand how your loved one responded and maybe ask for tips for future visits.
- 2. Reflect as a Family:** Share moments from the visit with other family members, focusing on the positive, even if there were challenges. Decide on what could be tried the next time.



## Taking Someone Home

- Ensure you have all supplies to take with you (i.e. Medications; extra change of clothes; pads; clothing protector; etc.)
- Keep them warm. Most don't like the cold! (blanket for in the car; scarf; mittens, etc.)
- Consider using a garbage bag or pad on the seat.
- Have a plan B! If they are not content, have someone pre-designated to return them back to the care home early.
- If they ask often, "*When am I going back*", You could reassure them in a calm voice: "*Yes, we are going back right after we eat dinner.*"
- Keep them busy with items in their hand if they seem anxious.
- Sit them in a spot at the table that is easy for them to get to. May also need to sit them facing a wall with limited distractions.

## Other General Suggestions for the holidays:

- ✿ **Keep It Short:** Visits don't need to be long to be meaningful.
- ✿ **Focus on Creating Positive Emotional Memories:** Even if your loved one doesn't remember the details, the emotions you share such as love, joy, and connection... may linger instead.
- ✿ **Take Photos & Videos:** Capture the memories!
- ✿ If they ask about people from the past Christmas, go into their reality. ("Sorry, they are not able to visit us this year")
- ✿ **Limit distractions** when speaking with the person.
- ✿ **When others visit**, provide them with some helpful tips on how to communicate (i.e. Speak slower or speak in their left ear.)
- ✿ **Have a plan B!** (Especially if you plan to take them out of the home)

## Karen's Top 3 Family Caregiver Survival Tips:

1. Take breaks
2. Talk it out
3. Never stop learning

***Time shared together  
with those we love, is  
the most valuable gift  
there is.*** 

**We hope these tips will help you and your loved ones enjoy a very Merry Christmas!**



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