

ELDER LAW REVIEW

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Dementia during the Holidays

The holiday season can always be a bit stressful, but how do you handle the holidays when a family member has dementia? When a loved one has dementia, often times it does not work to change patterns, schedules or traditions.

To a person suffering from memory issues, change can be frustrating and frightening. One piece of advice is to try and keep the traditions the same way they have grown accustomed to.

Additionally, it is a good idea to have only one person help the loved one with dementia throughout your family gathering. The person delegated should assist your family member with their meal and other activities that take place during your holiday traditions. By having one person assigned to this task, you won't overwhelm your family member with everything that is going on around them.

During the holidays your loved one will most likely see people that he or she probably hasn't seen in a while. Prepare new guests for the possibility of repeated questions and lack of recognition. Make sure you let your family know not to ask too many complicated questions. Yes or no questions can even be hard for a person with dementia to answer due to their memory loss. You don't want to challenge them and possibly upset them. Keeping the questions simple and letting them talk will help with the conversations.

When deciding on what to get a loved one with dementia, it's smart to keep the gifts ideas simple and safe. Gifts such as movies, photo albums, or music are great ideas that your loved one can use time and again. Games that require concentration

such as crossword puzzles or memory games can be appropriate in some situations, but very frustrating in others depending on the severity of the memory loss.

Although the holidays can be a very busy time, you should always try to keep your loved ones schedule the same. If he or she usually takes a nap at 2 pm, make sure he or she is still taking a nap at the same general time. Try to do the same with meal times as well. We can all adjust to our loved ones schedule with ease and it may not be so successful if they try to adjust to ours.

Although the holidays may feel overwhelming while caring for someone with memory loss, remember, you are also helping them have an enjoyable holiday season. They won't be around forever and this time should be treasured. While you are helping your loved one, please don't forget to let yourself enjoy the holidays and have fun with family and friends!

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