

Interacting During the Holidays with Family and Friends **By: Diana Primavesi, Public Education Coordinator and** **Brooke Werry, Trent University Nursing Student**

During the holidays, there is often an increase of visitors to the family household. If the visitor has not interacted with the person with dementia in sometime it may be helpful to make them aware of some symptoms the person may experience during the visit. Ensure the visitor knows that not all symptoms of dementia are the same for every person. You know your loved one best and know which symptoms to be aware of. It can be helpful to remind your guests that the person with dementia may:

- Experience poor memory of recent events
- Get lost & lose things
- Be restless, anxious, & easily get distracted
- Have emotional swings
- Have poor judgement
- Do things which are socially inappropriate
- Forget how to do everyday tasks
- Have difficulty understanding what is said to them
- Forget what things are
- Have difficulty knowing what to say because they forget the words and how to express themselves with language
- Have trouble in group situations
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It is important to emphasize that visitors help the person with dementia stay relaxed and feel secure. You need to change your behaviour to adapt to the dementia because the person with the disease cannot. It is also important to let the visitor know if an incident happens where they feel offended that they should not take it personally. If you know the person does have trouble in group situations it may be easier for them to have individual visits instead of the typical group visits.

Language may be another barrier that may require visitors to adapt to the person with dementia's needs. Some points to consider are:

- Use positive body language like leaning in to listen and smiling when speaking.
- Use feelings, gestures, and actions as they can become more important than words
- Encourage the person in their attempts to express themselves when they are having trouble communicating
- Allow plenty of time for the person with dementia to listen to what you have said
- Ask "yes" or "no" questions rather than open-ended questions
- Present one idea at a time
- If the person becomes agitated or anxious because they are misunderstanding the message, distract that person with an unrelated topic

The most important thing to remember is that the person with dementia is still a person. Adapt to the person they are and allow them to be comfortable. We hope you find this article helpful through the holiday season. Happy Holidays!