

How to Enjoy Holiday Traditions with a Loved One Living with Dementia

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Do the holidays hold special memories for you and your family? Do you look forward to certain traditions each year? When you think of the holidays, do many different sights, smells, and sounds come to mind?

Now that you have a loved one living with dementia, are you afraid that everything will be different? That you will no longer be able to enjoy baking cookies, shopping for gifts, and decorating your home together?

Dementia does change things, but there is no reason why you cannot continue to enjoy the many different aspects of the season that bring you happiness. The little things are what make the holidays special, and with a little creativity and support, you can help your loved one to continue to participate and be engaged in meaningful activities of the season.

Here are nine ideas to think about:

1. Decorate the tree – Do your ornaments tell a story? As you decorate your tree, let your loved one touch and hold each ornament, and recall the many memories associated with each one.
2. Fill your home with fragrance – Simmer some cinnamon and cloves in a pot on the stove. Let your loved one tell you stories of how they used to bake with their grandmother in the kitchen and what their favorite recipes were.
3. Hang an Advent calendar – Get an interesting advent calendar and have fun opening it each day. There are many to choose from, so select one with a theme that your loved one will enjoy.
4. Play Christmas music – Play holiday music and sing carols together. Music can have a wonderful effect on our mood, and can make a tremendous difference in the quality of life for a person living with dementia.
5. Spend time coloring – Coloring is not just for kids anymore! It is a great activity for the entire family to do together. Buy crayons, markers, and colored pencils in every color under the rainbow. Find a place in your home to hang your beautiful creations!
6. Wrap gifts together – Take your time in letting your loved one help you with the wrapping or filling the stockings. Give them pretty pieces of paper to hold and admire, and let them adorn each package with stickers and bows.

7. Look at Christmas cards – Do you keep your cards from year to year? Many people treasure the cards that they receive from family and friends. Keep them in a basket and take the time to look at them each day. Read the sentiments out loud, admire the beautiful artwork, and reminisce about the person who sent you the card.
8. Get outside – Don't forget to take your loved one outside for fresh air! Even though it may be chilly, it can be a wonderful time of year to spend a few minutes outside in nature, even if it's just on your deck.
9. Make a few easy treats in the kitchen – What holiday traditions do you have when it comes to special treats? Can you find a recipe that only requires a few ingredients? Peanut butter balls and homemade nuts and bolts are quick and easy to make. Get the ingredients and utensils organized, and help your loved one follow the sequence of steps to make the finished product. Enjoy with a cup of tea!