



Make the Most of Visiting Your Loved One in a Nursing Home

Visiting a friend or loved one at a nursing home can be a rewarding and uplifting experience, both for you and for the nursing home resident. At times, however, visiting may be a challenge. Here are some tips to keep in mind and some suggestions of activities to do while visiting.

Tips for Visiting

- If you have told your friend or loved one that you will be visiting, it is important to keep your word and arrive on time. Visits are often eagerly anticipated by residents, so if you cannot make it or will be late, call to let the resident or a staff person know.
- Visits do not need to be lengthy in order to be meaningful. Communicating your sincere interest and concern is what's key.
- Feelings of sadness and “wanting to go home” are very common emotions for nursing home residents and it is important to listen to those who voice these feelings. There is no magic response to these feelings, what is important is that you listen and offer compassion. Then do your best to keep the resident from dwelling on problems or illness.
- Try to stimulate your loved ones' mind and lead an upbeat conversation. Reminiscing is healthy, but focus on current activities too.
- Promote conversation by asking open-ended questions. I.E.: “What pets did you have as a child?” instead of “Do you like animals?” and “What were summers like when you were a child?” instead of “Isn't this weather great?”
- Check with staff before bringing in food treats. Some items may not be allowed on your loved one's diet, or special arrangements may be needed for storage of food items.
- Before leaving, check the social calendar and offer to take your loved one to the next activity if it's about to begin as you are finishing your visit.

Visit Ideas

- Bring pictures for your visit. Older pictures can help your loved one to reminisce and recent pictures can help her feel included in the events of your life.
- If your loved one's nursing home is not in his hometown, consider subscribing to his hometown newspaper and bringing it along on your visits.
- If someone in the family is musically inclined, have them bring their instrument and provide a private "concert" for your loved one.
- Provide some pampering. Give a manicure, or put together a pretty package of perfume and make-up.
- Ask for help in planning your garden. Or help your loved one make a terrarium or an indoor windowsill garden.
- Challenge your loved one to a spelling contest, board game or round of cards.
- Ask your loved one to help record family memories. Bring in a tape recorder or camcorder and "interview" her for a few minutes each time you visit. Ask about the family tree, ancestors' occupations, the homestead, what the community was like when she was young.
- Bring along youngsters' school projects to share with your loved one during a visit.
- Many homes allow pets to visit. See about bringing yours in for a tactile change of pace for your loved one.
- Start a friendly, newsy "chain letter" to send along to family. Ask every recipient to add a little personal news before sending it on. Make sure the last person sends it back to your loved one.
- Facilitate a reunion. For your next visit, bring along one of your loved one's old friends.