Coping with the Holidays
When a Loved One is in a Nursing Home

Those with loved ones in nursing homes may be at a loss when the holidays are approaching. How do we uphold our family traditions? Should we involve our loved one in celebrations? Are children encouraged to visit nursing homes? Why am I feeling distracted or guilty?

These types of questions and feelings may signify normal reactions to what can be a challenging situation, especially for those facing the holidays after a nursing home placement within the past year.

Most importantly, **stay involved** in your loved one's life. All nursing home placements are sought because of significant impairments in physical or cognitive functioning. It is important to keep in mind that traditions may need to be adjusted for these changes. Open your heart to new possibilities and new ways of celebrating and connecting. Remember that all traditions naturally change over time.

If you are able to transport your loved one to a family meal in a private home, keep in mind that these plans may need to be altered at a moment's notice. Let the nurse know in advance of excursions so that medications can be altered and prepared accordingly. Notify the facility staff at least a week in advance if you wish dine in the facility on a holiday ($12/holiday meal; $10/regular meal). Think about checking with nursing staff to see if you can bring in a traditional or ethnic dish.

Encourage intergenerational celebrating but alleviate child and teen fears by explaining about your loved one's needs and behaviors ahead of time. This might be a good strategy to prepare anyone who has not seen the nursing home resident in a while.

Some ways of keeping connected during the holidays can be: assisting with decoration of the nursing home room; taking dictation for Christmas greeting cards; taking walks in the nursing home to appreciate other decorations; bringing in smells of the holidays (cookies, cinnamon, evergreen scents) or items like picture albums to help reminisce; taking a drive around town to appreciate light displays; bringing headphones and a playlist of your loved one's favorite holiday tunes; setting up video chatting for your long-distance relatives; attending a holiday event together in the facility (**consult the facility activities calendar, which is also posted online at matulaitisnh.org on the News page**); giving your loved one a hand massage with scented lotions; reserving space (860-928-7976 x322) for your family's celebration in the nursing home.

Creating new memories that are positive will help everyone's transition. If you find yourself personally unmotivated to do anything, feeling sad most of the day for weeks on end, unable to eat or sleep well, feeling unexplained fatigue, distractibility, slowness or restlessness, or having thoughts about not wanting to live, be sure to speak with your healthcare provider. You may also want to join our caregiver support group, which meets the third Thursday of the month (6:00-7:30pm; 860-928-7976 x337) or another local caregiver support group (860-377-6416—cell phone, Kathy Demers). For those affected by dementia, there is a 24-hour support hotline from the Alzheimer's Association that may also benefit caregivers: 1-800-272-3900.

We wish you joyous holidays
& a blessed upcoming year!