

A Caregiver's Guide for the

Holidays

RESOURCE

COUNSELOR

ADVOCATE

FRIEND





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Creative Care Management (CCM) is a professional story and a personal story.

Charlotte Bishop started CCM more than 20 years ago. Soon after that Charlotte's husband was diagnosed with brain cancer. Charlotte became her own spouse's personal case manager until his untimely death three years later. This personal journey evolved into a professional journey and certification as a Geriatric Care Manager (GCM) and the part of CCM dedicated to "Serving Elders and Others."

Creative Care Management is a team of certificated professionals providing answers to older adults in Illinois and their families.

Home Safer for the Holidays



If you will be heading home for any of these seasonal holidays you will find that it can be a wonderful trip back in time as you revisit your own family history in the context of your mom's or dad's house.

But when you visit, take a closer look at how safe that house may still be for your older parent living there. Some parts of the home interior landscape may be just like you remember them, but they could now pose hazards to your older parents.

Start with electrical fixtures. Check for where the cords to lamps or telephones and other household appliances are.



If they are in the flow of traffic, consider arranging furniture differently. Also, remember that extension cords are really only meant for temporary use, so it is a good idea to move fixtures to be closer to outlets. If you must use an extension cord, place it against a wall to reduce the trip hazard. If there are electrical cords under furniture, check for wear on the insulation to avoid fire risks. Cords under carpeting or rugs also can wear to the point that the floor covering becomes a fire hazard. And, of course, frayed or cracked cords should be replaced. Finally, check to see that all outlets have secure cover plates so that no wires are exposed. Do the hands-on test as well to be certain no outlet is unusually warm to the touch, a sign of potential overloads and therefore a fire risk.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission has estimated that thousands of people 65 years and older each year are treated in hospital emergency rooms for falls associated with rugs or floor runners.

Older adults have less agility and some shuffle as they walk making the trip hazard even greater, so remove rugs that cannot be securely attached to the floor. It is easy to use double-sided adhesive tape to secure rugs or use rubber matting under the rug cut to size as an alternative.

In addition to replacing batteries in smoke detectors, make sure there are enough detectors placed throughout the house. Especially if one of your older parents has any difficulties with hearing, you will want to have multiple detectors, and they typically come with instructions on where they optimally should be placed in the house. Adding a carbon monoxide detector also is important if there are any fuel-burning appliances in the home.

Even homes with electric kitchen appliances may have gas-burning heating units or water heaters.

Because accidents can still happen despite all these preventive measures, make sure emergency numbers are close to every telephone in the house. Include the local Poison Control Center along with a trusted neighbor's number and your own family ICE (in case of emergency)

contact. Write these telephone numbers in large print and tape conspicuously near each land line. Check also that phones and contact numbers are accessible to your parent in the event that an accident leaves them unable to stand.



4 Caregiver Conversations for the Holidays

ably healthy, so talk to your own insurance broker or human resource director where you work. Your parent may already have been thinking about it and would welcome a chance to chat about plans and questions.

You may not be a long distance caregiver to your older parent, but this visit you notice that they are measurably less able to manage some of the basic activities of daily living.

or dad on a part-time or seasonal basis, or if you are taking them to adult day care, make sure you take advantage of the tax breaks to which you are entitled. Talk with a tax consultant or accountant about what services qualify for deductions as well as the documentation you may need. This may be a pleasant surprise and relief from some of the financial burden of caregiving.

Finally, what you may be facing qualifies as “none of the above.” Again, consider your human resource professional at your workplace. They may have listings of resources available to you as well as actual help in the form of workplace benefits to which you are entitled. And, of course, a geriatric care manager can be tapped as a knowledgeable resource. I often refer to this part of what we do as geriatric care managers as filling the role of “option-makers” for you, the “decision-makers.”

If you are a caregiver, you may anticipate using some of your holiday time with older parents to talk about their changing needs. Especially if you live some distance away from mom or dad, you may see some changes in your parents when you visit them or they visit you for a holiday get together. Here are four issues that you may want to be at least prepared to consider if you are one of the sandwich generation who is assuming greater responsibilities for your parents at the same time you are raising or launching your own children.

Can you or a sibling or your spouse take time from other responsibilities to be the adult who will provide hands-on care for your parent? If not, there are good options. You may bring a daily caregiver to your parents' home, and there are certified agencies that can provide the help.

Or, you may find that local non-profit organizations or even senior residential communities have adult day care, sometimes called respite care, that can be great for someone who needs a bit of help and would benefit from the social stimuli.

If you're out of the Chicago area, go the national association web site's "care manager finder" (<http://memberfinder.caremanager.org/>) page to find someone near you.

Your parents may be in good physical health, so you think that there is nothing to talk about. After all, there are no medical issues to tackle this holiday. But now may be just the time to talk with mom or dad about long term care insurance. There is a wide range of options for long term care insurance that can be used to cover the costs of home care as well as institutional stays, if needed. And as with any health or life insurance, it is important to qualify when one is still reason-

If you already have progressed through both of these and have been taking care of mom

Find a Care Manager

Search Type: Zip/Postal Code: Distance: 10 miles

Member Type: (Select at least one)

Fellow / Certified GCM Certified GCM Associate GCM





GIFTS

Caregivers Should Give Themselves

Caregiver survival starts with what I call the Golden Rule of Care-giving: “Do something for yourself so that you are able to do something for another!” Translated, if you take care of yourself, you will be better able to take care of someone else...and the opposite will hold true as well. If you do not take care of yourself as a caregiver, it will hurt your ability to take care of someone else. Lending help to the caregiver is important so that the caregiver is able, in turn, to lend their helping hand to an older person. And the holidays are when it is really easy to put the caregiver at the bottom of the list of priorities.



1 Give yourself credit for the hard work you have done. You should thank yourself with as much heart as the person for whom you care. If you are not being thanked – as sometimes can happen in cases like dementia – then there are therapists who can help you to find the tangible appreciation for what you are doing for a loved one.



2 Give yourself what you would give to another person whom you would meet seeing the needs you have. Some of this will start with a simple recognition that you have needs, too. Then, give yourself a bit of leverage from other people and resources on whom you are entitled to call. When someone offers to help, accept the offer.



3 Give yourself a break. The solution to working at something that can be terribly demanding is not to place even more demands on yourself. Take time – perhaps through respite care – to be good to yourself in a meaningful way. That can be regular exercise, meditation, therapy, coffee with a dear friend or whatever restores you. (But it may be best if it is not something that isolates you as much as connects you to others.)



4 Give yourself permission to be sad, angry, afraid or even resentful. Some of this is a natural response to an emotionally demanding job, but find an appropriate way to vent or redirect these emotions. And do not redirect them at yourself as too many caregivers often do. That can lead to depression or burnout or even aggression toward your loved one.



5 Give yourself a voice. In part, that means that you have to talk through some of the issues you will face as a caregiver, issues like saying goodbye to your loved one. And you can use some of your voice also to advocate on behalf of your loved one to be sure they get the care they need from agencies and providers.



Having now given yourself all of these, you will be able to care for a loved one in as positive a way as you can. As you do so, remember one more thing. You do not have to be a perfect caregiver. You just have to be “good enough.” For more resources, check on line with the National Family Caregiver’s Association <http://www.nfcares.org/>.



As our bodies age, certain nerve pathways begin to fail, and the human anatomy uncannily reroutes many of the circuits as they stop firing. But with age, more and more of those pathways may slow or fail for a variety of reasons, and it just makes it harder for older adults to do the simple manual tasks they used to do without even a thought.

The Mitten Test

The trees are all but bare of leaves and snow has already powdered the Midwest. Time to get out your winter coats, wool scarves and mittens, right? Your winter mittens have another useful purpose that can help you make home an easier place for your older loved ones. Try this on your holiday visit to mom or dad.

As our bodies age, certain nerve pathways begin to fail, and the human anatomy uncannily reroutes many of the circuits as they stop firing. But with age, more and more of those pathways may slow or fail for a variety of reasons, and it just makes it harder for older adults to do the simple manual tasks they used to do without even a thought. Turning a door knob, turning on a lamp or taking the lid off a jar become challenging, maybe even impossible. It is hard for those of you who may be in the prime of your lives to really get this, no matter how empathetic, so I recommend an easy exercise to help you experience what this erosion of manual dexterity and fine motor skills feels like. In doing so, you can also help identify challenging hardware or activities that can be more easily managed with a bit of creative help.

With a pair of mittens, walk through each of the rooms in your elder loved one's home and go through the normal activities of the person who lives in those rooms. As you enter a room, it may be more challenging to flip a light switch or twist the switch on a lamp with your hands in mittens. These can be remedied by retrofitting wall switches with the larger rectangular switches that one merely presses on and off. Likewise, the lamp twist switches that are challenging with mittens can be replaced with wider winged grips. And even before you enter a room, the door knob may be your undoing if the knob is too small or too slippery. Handles may be an appropriate replacement.

In the kitchen you will find that mittens are effective barriers to everything from opening the ketchup bottle to a twisting the lid on a jar of apple sauce or beverage bottle and more. Some of the web sites and stores with helpful assistive devices were in the blog Safer Senior Living-The Kitchen (<http://www.creativecasemanagement.com/Blog/tabid/398/EntryId/49/Safer-Senior-Living-The-Kitchen.aspx>). And if a key itself is hard for an older loved one to grip when opening a door, hardware stores have over-sized sheaths to make gripping easier.

With your mittens still on, try tying your shoe laces or buttoning a shirt or blouse. It may be time to get creative with Velcro-equipped shoes or other substitute hardware for buttons. And go through the motions of other self-grooming activities to determine what challenges are manageable and which are just out of reach. The number of what are called "assistive devices" will amaze you as you look to television remote controls, computer access and more.



Check out the Department of Health and Human Services Assistive Technology site. (http://www.eldercare.gov/ELDERCARE.NET/Public/Resources/Factsheets/Assistive_Technology.aspx)



CCM, Inc. can be there when you can't

We are the professionals who help families who are caring for older adults (geriatric care management) or others with special needs. Our professional geriatric care managers and special needs case managers can be your eyes and ears when you simply cannot. You can count on us to help you manage both your care-giving responsibilities, and those of your family and your work that cannot be ignored...or postponed. Some of our clients refer to us as their Sister in ChicagoSM.

We serve Chicago's North side and the North, Northwest and West suburbs as well as Central Illinois.

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