

TIPS FOR REUNION VISITS

Whether the person with dementia is at home or in a long-term care community

Plan and Prepare

- First and foremost, consult the latest CDC guidelines for mask-wearing, social distancing, and appropriate in-person activities and physical contact for fully-vaccinated individuals.
- Find out ahead of time—from the primary caregiver in the home or the staff at the long-term care community—how the person with dementia is doing physically and cognitively so you are prepared for potential changes in appearance and behavior prior to the visit.
- Ask the caregiver (or the community staff) about when is a good time for a visit and recommendations on how long to plan on staying.
- Ask the caregiver (or the community staff) if you could bring a small gift or favorite food item for the person.
- Instead of having the whole family go for the first visit, have one or two go so as to not overwhelm the person.
- Sensory cues are helpful if you haven't seen the person in awhile. Perhaps wear a perfume that they might recognize as your familiar smell or a recognizable piece of clothing and/or bring along an item with a special memory.

At the Visit

- When you see the person, say their name and also introduce yourself. Do not assume they will know who you are right away. See how they react and then respond accordingly.
- Do not ask them: "Do you remember me?"
- Do not be surprised if they fail to recognize you at first.
- If you are wearing a mask, perhaps bring along a photo of yourself without a mask on to help them recognize you.
- In fact, bring a few photos to share with them—of the two of you together, of past family gatherings—though avoid photos with too many faces as that might be confusing for them.
- Do not assume they will know about Covid-19 and why you have been unable to visit. But do not dwell on the pandemic; instead bridge to a more positive topic of conversation.
- When talking with the person, accept their reality—whether that is today or 20 years ago. Follow their lead.

Easy Ways to Make the Conversation go More Smoothly

- Be a good listener.
- Be patient if they repeat the same questions and statements.
- Avoid correcting them.
- Refrain from asking questions, rather make statements and share thoughts.
- Use short sentences and speak slowly but don't speak to them using childish, cutesy phrases.
- Pay attention to your tone of voice.
- Be supportive and encourage the person to continue to express themselves even if it is hard to follow what they are saying or it is taking a long time.
- If allowed/appropriate, pat or hold their hand.

Pay Attention to Body Language

- Keep your cell phone in your purse or pocket, so you are not tempted to check it during the visit.
- Be present and enjoy just being with them.
- Your mood affects their mood. Stay calm and positive. Smile (even if wearing a mask!)
- Be comfortable in the silence—do not feel the need to keep talking.
- Observe how the visit is going and how they are doing, if you sense any agitation, consider not staying as long as you had planned.
- If allowed/appropriate, hug them goodbye. And thank them for a nice visit.