

Giving Gifts to Residents

What do you give a person who lives in a long-term care home? Choosing gifts for residents who enjoy activities and hobbies is easy. It's a little tougher for residents who suffer from dementias, such as Alzheimer's disease. Here are some gift ideas we hope will please the person you love.

Gifts to Wrap

- Give gifts that stimulate activity: A pair of gardening gloves and tools for the enthusiastic gardener. A deck of cards. Knitting needles, yarn and a pattern. Paints and a sketch book. A bird house and supply of seed. It doesn't matter if your family member is unable to use the gift with the same ability as years ago; sometimes it's enough to just hold an object and remember.
- Choose items that trigger memories about past achievements: A shiny tackle box for the fisherman. A model car (plane, train, etc.). A canning jar full of preserves. Books (large print if possible) or calendars on subjects of interest — even cookbooks full of photographs for the consummate cook.
- Attractive clothing, suitable for the season, labelled, requires no ironing. Wheelchair or walker caddies.
- Personalize or brighten your family member's room with cushions, favourite ornaments, plants, a bright (cotton) bedspread, a kleenex box cover, a small bulletin board for pictures, cards.
- Inspire a laugh with a hand puppet, stuffed animal, baseball cap, posters.

Gifts that Give All Year Round

- Hire a photographer or persuade a friend who's good with a camera to take a family photograph, with your family member front and centre. Display the picture prominently.
- Contract a florist to send flowers monthly. Send a card once a month (we all love mail).
- Does your family member like pets? Find a service or individual who will take a pet on regular visits.
- Make a family picture board. Include pictures of your family member at all ages. Add short write-ups that describe past achievements and special moments. Picture boards encourage staff to see your parent differently and to initiate meaningful conversation that builds self-esteem.
- Create an oral history. Set up a tape recorder and ask your family member to tell stories about the past. You can hire people to do this for you — people with honed interviewing skills who know how to tap memories. You can't beat the gift of showing an interest — of encouraging people to talk about themselves and relive the good days (maybe even the bad).
- Hire a companion to take your family member on regular walks.
- Encourage your family member's friendships by bringing the friend a small gift, or, give a gift that's easy to share.
- Arrange for regular perms, haircuts, foot and nail care...even massages (some massage therapists will travel to the home).

Gifts that Bring You Together

- Take your family member to a Christmas concert, spiffy new restaurant, grandchild's hockey game, ice capades, opera, jazz or blues bar — it doesn't have to be a long time to be a good time.
- Give the gift of feeling useful. If kitchen or workshop activities used to delight, invite your parent home for an afternoon of stirring batter, cutting cookie shapes, sanding wood (the smells alone associated with these beloved activities can be a powerful high). You can ask for help with gift wrapping and tree decorating.
- The best gift is yourself and your time. Give often.

EXTENDICARE

Talk to your director of care if you are concerned about the appropriateness of your gift idea (particularly if it's food).