



Melanie Bunn's tips for Finding Peace & Joy During the Holidays

Holidays can be complicated but there are many things care partners can do to make them more enjoyable for the person with dementia and for themselves.

Holidays typically have three components to consider: family, faith and festivities. Melanie Bunn uses the acronym **PEACE** to show caregivers how making simple changes in each component can lead to a more joyful holiday celebration.

Prioritize- Decide which pieces of the holiday are most important and meaningful to the person living with dementia. Are there certain traditions, foods or faith practices that the person holds dear? Do your best to keep those elements while letting go of some less important ones. Be flexible and simplify.

Empathize- Think about the whole experience from the perspective of someone living with dementia. You may need to modify the way you do things to accommodate changes in the person's perception. Things like decorations may be beautiful to you but disorienting to the person with dementia. It is also important to empathize with others who will be impacted by the necessary changes. Have conversations with family members in advance. Let them know that some things may be different this year but you will still be able to enjoy the holiday together.

Adjust- Modify and simplify the festivities to make them more enjoyable for the person with dementia and less stressful for you. This may include changing the time of a meal from dinner to lunch or having a few smaller gatherings with family instead of one large one. Consider limiting choices of foods and activities to avoid overwhelming the person with dementia. Pay attention to signs that your loved one may be getting uncomfortable and have a plan to address that if needed.

Capture- Use cameras, cell phones and video cameras to record special moments. Use props such as holiday foods, decorations and photographs from previous holidays to trigger memories. Be sure to include yourself in some of the pictures and videos. In future years, these can be used to reminisce.

Enjoy- Pull back from all the planning and enjoy the event yourself. Enlist others to help you with your loved one so that you can enjoy your meal and visit with family.

As you prepare to celebrate the holidays, you may also find that they can be a time of grieving. Grief is a normal response to loss whether it is the loss of the way things have always been or the changes in your loved one caused by dementia. Be patient with yourself as you experience these feelings. Have a plan to "check out" if needed. That may mean talking to a family or friend or even leaving the festivities briefly and going to a quiet place for a moment to relax.

Melanie offers one final tip for keeping PEACE during the holiday: Keep enough routine in the day to maintain familiarity without losing the uniqueness of the holiday.

Alzheimer's Tennessee wishes you a peaceful holiday season.