



# ***Making the Most of a Visit***

LifeCare Memos® - Messages of Compassion

If Dave Letterman were to list the top ten places to visit, the local Care Center would not be on the list. As a whole, people find it difficult to visit Nursing Homes. Some don't like the smells, some find it depressing and many wonder what they should say or do when they see their neighbor, friend or relative after a health crisis. At times, even family members are hesitant to visit.

However, regular, consistent visits are essential to the quality of life of Residents. The people in these homes need to know they are loved and not forgotten. They long for unhurried contact with friends, family and even new acquaintances. A visit can bring great encouragement and give hope when discouragement, grief, depression and the challenges of old age creep in and take center stage.

## **Tips for Visiting**

### **Let the Resident know you are coming:**

Anticipation is worth as much as the visit *if you follow through and come*. If you need to change your plans let them know. Visits are so important that Residents will talk for a whole week about a son or daughter coming; it is similar to the anticipation of Christmas or birthdays. So let them know with a phone call a few days ahead, or pick a regular day and time during the week or month to visit.

### **Bring a small gift:**

What might the Resident like? Do they have a favorite food or drink? Do they receive the local newspaper or church bulletin? Does their room need a seasonal furnishing? Residents will talk with staff and friends about this small gesture for several days following the visit. Even if the Resident can not see or hear well, or illness prevents them from speaking, they will be honored with your gift.

### **Remove the barriers to a quality visit:**

**Timing:** In most cases the resident prefers a visit over anything else, even sleeping. However, if they have been involved in therapy, activities or just received pain medication, they may prefer to sleep or be unable to stay awake. Feel free to ask the staff (call ahead) about a good time to visit.

**Confusion:** Tell them who you are. Remind them of familiar things. Never chastise them or express frustration because they cannot remember or are unable to communicate as clearly as they once could. Do not ask, "Do you remember who I am?" This embarrasses the Resident with memory problems.

Hearing: Can they hear? Do they have their hearing aids in? Sitting next to their good ear helps. Remember, the cognitively impaired can still hear and want social interaction even if they cannot contribute verbally. Visit in a place that doesn't have a lot of distractions. Ask if you can turn off the TV. Ask a nurse if it would be okay to take them to the coffee shop, Resident kitchen, or even outdoors if weather permits.

Sight: Do they have their glasses on?

Smells: Sometimes unpleasant smells are associated with Care Centers. If you encounter this, communicate cordially with the staff. You may also take the Resident to another location that is more conducive to visiting.

Arguments: Relationships may involve conflict, but do what you can to avoid arguing. People who hurt sometimes hurt others by the things they say or do.

Topics of Conversation: Your conversation can center around their recent activities, catching up on family news or mutual friends, recent news from their church, place of work or where they volunteered. If the Resident wants to talk, listen and support. If you know them, remembering favorite times together can also spark other fun memories.

**Build a relationship:**

Set a realistic goal of visiting once a week or twice a month, whatever works for you, but be consistent. Our elders have lost many loved ones and need to strengthen relationships and build new ones.

**Read something they enjoy:**

For those who have difficulty interacting verbally or are sight impaired, read a letter, short story, current event, church bulletin, devotional, poetry, etc.

**Listen:**

Your presence and listening are perhaps the two greatest keys to your visit. Listening involves sympathy, empathy, paying attention to what is said or not said as well as to non-verbal action, proper posture and reflection.

Listening also assures the Resident of your support, builds confidence and helps them through fears, confusion, loneliness, boredom, helplessness, and other challenges. Listening encourages others to express what they are thinking, to clarify their thoughts and release emotion. Listening is therapeutic.

## How to say Goodbye:

At the beginning of your visit tell the Resident how long you plan to visit. Give notice when your departure time is drawing near. If you are comfortable, pray for the Resident or give a “blessing” as you leave. You might pray something like: “Dear God, bless my dear friend, Joan. Help her to know that you are with her always. Watch over her with your love, kindness, care and protection while we are apart. Cause her to be a blessing to others here at the home and thank you for each one who helps her with her daily needs. Amen!”

Make your presence a blessing to someone today. “Just DO IT!”

*“Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, ‘Take courage, fear not’” (Isaiah 35:3-4a, NASB).*

*“Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” (I Thessalonians 4:10-12, NASB)*

Dan Osborn, 270212

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## **LifeCare Memos<sup>®</sup>**

When experiencing the stresses of life, people need support. The Psalmist needed that support and found it when he turned to **GOD**. He said, *“Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one **cares for my life**. I cry to You, O **LORD**; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’” (Psalm 142:4-5).*

**LifeCare Memos** are designed as messages of compassion that integrate biblical guidelines for emotional and spiritual well-being. Topics focus on various life-care issues and address them from the perspective of Scripture.