



Be 'Prepared to Care' this Christmas: 5 top tips when visiting elderly relatives

Family caring can be difficult at any time and even more so during busy holidays when there are so many calls on care givers' time and energy. Our 5 top tips are here to help your loved ones remain safe, happy and independent. So, as well as enjoying precious family times together, work through our Christmas 'Prepared to Care' top tips.

1. Take time to listen

Older people can often be left out of family chat, they may be hard of hearing or the conversation may go too quickly. Many people find it difficult to talk about their worries and fears, often because they don't want to worry others. Sometimes people feel more able to talk when they are not making eye contact, for example when walking together or carrying out joint tasks. So, involve elderly people in present-wrapping, sprout-peeling and washing-up and take the opportunity to have quality talk.

2. Check for changes

Put on your Sherlock hat and check for any signs that your relative has new health or other issues. Is medication organised, up-to-date and being taken? When was the last dental or opticians' check? Age related macular degeneration is treatable if caught early but otherwise can lead to blindness. Dodgy teeth make eating difficult. How is your relative's balance/memory/weight/hygiene? Are there letters from the GP, hospital, or other service which indicate that all is not well? Are there any new 'friends' on the scene who might be taking advantage of your relative.

3. Do a house audit

While you are there, check that your relatives' home is being maintained. How is security – door locks and window catches in good order and being used? Would an outside security light be helpful? Are there 'lights on timers'

for when your loved ones are out of the house? Are there trip hazards: slippery mats, frayed carpets, loose slippers? Would a personal alarm in case of falls be a good idea? Are everyday items in easy reach? Are mobility aids working correctly? Are there any adjustments, for example handrails, walk-in showers, easy turn taps, that would make everyday life easier? Is the house warm? Do any of the jobs that you have been asked to do suggest that regular extra help with everyday chores is needed?

4. Review finances

Are there unopened bills? Check bank statements to ensure no unusual transactions. Is money left around the house? Are direct debits set up to help pay regular bills? Do you know the details of utility companies, social media accounts, banks, and other services? Do unauthorised people have access to cards/pin numbers? Is your loved one at risk from identity theft?

5. Connect with neighbours

Take a moment to see neighbours. They are on the spot and many 'keep an eye out' for elderly local people. It's a good moment to thank them for their help and make sure they have up to date contact details for you in case of emergencies. A small gift is a nice way of showing your appreciation. Make sure too that you have up-to-date contact details for your relative's GP, neighbours and friends.

Caring4Elders offer a range of services to support people who are family carers, including workshops in the workplace, training packages and sessions for community groups. Visit our website for more information www.caring4eldersuk.org.uk