

Holiday Tips: Get the 411 Before They Call 911

by Laura Case,
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The holidays are right around the corner. It's a time we look forward to all year to be around family and friends. Many are gathering around the dinner table enjoying a feast, there's a room full of talking and laughter, and this is sometimes the only time that many can gather in one place to accommodate everyone's busy schedules. With all of the eating, talking, laughing, and watching of TV such as a football game or a Hallmark movie, it seems like everyone is having a great time, but wait, let's take a timeout! How are Grandma and Grandpa doing with all of this commotion and togetherness? I know we all love gathering around to catch up and also having the grandparents around to see everyone too, but how are they **REALLY** doing?

This reminds me of a story a friend told me a few years ago that opened up the eyes of a family and a police officer. It took place on Christmas Eve; a family was gathering for their family holiday celebration and a few family members went to the Assisted Living home that afternoon to pick up Grandma. Grandma had her family all around her talking, eating, and laughing for the day but one thing that everyone didn't realize was that Grandma had very little knowledge of who these people were, why she was there, and when was she going home? A few hours into the holiday festivities there was a knock on the door. To the family's surprise there was a police officer responding to a 911 call. They came to realize that Grandma had placed the call to 911 since she thought she was in danger. She didn't know the people she was with or the place where she was brought to for the get together, but had remembered if she was ever in danger to call 911.

As you are planning your holiday gatherings with family members living with dementia please consider:

- A small gathering of family and friends at the loved one's home or community
- Most communities have a private dining event there, where the residents are already familiar with the surroundings and they may be comfortable only attending that
- Having very little or no extra noise in the background: television playing or multiple different conversations occurring at once
- Consider the time of the day to have your visit and knowing their schedule can be helpful
- Bring in a favorite meal and dessert and possibly play a favorite past time game
- Music is therapeutic, fun, and can bring back memories, maybe have a sing-along
- Gifts are wonderful, but your **presence**, just being with them may be all that they need

Enjoy your time together and the special memories, just be aware of all the extras that you may think are necessary to make the celebration a success may actually be a distraction for your loved one. Happy Holidays and may you and your family have a wonderful celebration together!

Laura lives in Atlanta, GA with her family. She joined PAC in 2016 after working at an Assisted Living community in which she still visits and volunteers to see her friends. In her teenage years, her grandparents moved in with their family. She enjoyed spending time with them and helping them in many ways until they became sick. That is when she realized how much the older generation has to offer with their wisdom, their stories from years past, and valuing the time to share with others in this busy world we live in...take time to smell the roses.

Laura enjoys spending time with her family, boating, cheering on her favorite sports teams, playing with her dogs, and she loves baking and cooking.