

Ideas for Holiday Connections When You Can't be Together in Person

This year, due to the pandemic, many of us will not be able to gather with family members for the holidays as we typically do. When our loved one is living with dementia and we aren't able to be with them in person, finding a way to connect can feel especially challenging. Here is a list of some ideas for ways to connect over the phone or video chat. Whenever possible, adapt the activity to meet the individual at their GEMS State. If an idea doesn't work on a particular day, don't be afraid to try again another time. Keep in mind that the goal is to create moments of connection, however short they may be.

Create a Simple Craft Together

The goal is that you would be creating the craft at the same time, over video chat (preferably) or phone. These crafts can all be modified/adapted for the earlier or later states of brain change.

Some examples:

- **Pipe Cleaner Candy Cane Ornaments** (supplies could be mailed):

Earlier States: Use alternating red/white beads on a pipe cleaner, could create multiple and string together for a garland

Later States: Twist the red and white pipe cleaners together to create stripes



- **Snowman Picture** (supplies could be mailed):

Earlier States: Glue or tape a white coffee filter to a piece of blue construction paper, cut out hat, nose, mouth, eye pieces to decorate

Later States: Glue or tape a white coffee filter to a piece of blue construction paper, decorate with marker or crayons



- **Pool Noodle Garlands** (supplies may need to be dropped off):

Earlier States: Use a plastic knife to slice pool noodles into small segments, string on a ribbon in alternating colors

Later States: String pre-cut pool noodle segments onto a thin rope



- **Craft Stick Stars** (supplies could be mailed)

Earlier States: Glue craft sticks together in the shape of a star, then decorate with paint, stickers, or glitter

Later States: Pre-attach VELCRO[®] brand dots to the ends of the craft sticks so they may easily be assembled to create a star, decorate with stickers or glitter glue



- **Paper Chains** (supplies could be mailed)
Earlier States: Cut paper strips in alternating colors; glue, staple, or tape strips together to make the chains, can incorporate other ornaments or decorations hanging from the chain links

Later States: Pre-cut the paper strips and attach VELCRO® brand dots so that the strips may just be attached together easily



Other Connection Ideas:

- On a voice message that can be replayed, record a reading of a holiday story (or other story) that may have some meaning or memory for your loved one, especially one that contains a sense of rhythm such as *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. Or, if they are computer savvy, send the recording in an email. A third option would be to read to them live over the phone or video chat.
- Download some photos of holiday objects and show them while you are on video chat, and discuss the pictures. For later states of dementia, use a lot fewer words and a much slower pace. Here is a link to a folder with some holiday photo ideas:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/k19dip7a7mdf9dv/AABNWLRMHCB_kOn7BGP-Yhmta?dl=0

Share holiday-related videos or music videos together over video chat. Here are links to some examples:

Christmas Nostalgia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGvrJ9a9vqc&feature=share>

A Christmas memory from 1942

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVHkDBrigsg&feature=share>

Christmas Sing-Along playlist

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pl9S1-K9qg&list=PL5OUbHcf869QniTnQU1WfjGxDPjIAftZy>

Vintage 50s and 60s Christmas memories

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwMmmx-hA2o>

Traditional Christmas church hymns and carols

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_8v_QI2ZNq

Judy Garland Christmas Special 1963 (includes orig. commercials)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzCL3FM9dDc>

Julie Andrews Christmas Special

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEI-52tLjDk>

Johnny Cash and Family Christmas Show

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHuFsIG6JAQ>

Retro Christmas music 60s and 70s classic TV variety specials

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSXQy1qEScl>

Bing Crosby Christmas collection

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACgjdEXaVUA&feature=share>

Crooners Christmas song collection

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEclvgHLOq0>

Vintage Best Songs from the 30s, 40s, and 50s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myyAkYqykbs>

Hanukkah – Songs of Celebration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBaKt4FJvo>

Hannukah Songs

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgFyCPs2XmE&list=PLLNH6UBMCX_4hNd1QB7spGQBrSYIGdAnS&index=1

Hanukkah Driedel Song – Yiddish

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDSVDzxN4zY>

Hanukkah piano music with pictures

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deQrmDP_rKM

Show family holiday photos over video chat, talk about memories

Show holiday-related objects over video chat (ornaments, decorations, candles)

Sing holiday songs together or listen to holiday music together over the phone

Mail them a gift or holiday card, but add a few drops of essential oil to the object. Choose a scent that you know they enjoy (examples of holiday scents include vanilla, peppermint, cinnamon, pine, cloves, cedar, almond). Or, if you wear a particular cologne or perfume, you might use that.

Other Christmas engagement ideas and resources:

<https://adventuresofacaregiver.com/christmas-countdown-dementia/>

If you feel like you're having trouble getting your loved one started and engaged, try these tips:

Positive Action Starters:

- **Help: Be sure to compliment his or her skill in this area, then ask for help with something**
“You are such a good baker, would you please help me decide what I should bake next?”
- **Try: Hold up or point to the item you would like to use, possibly sharing in the dislike of the item or task**
“I know crossword puzzles aren’t always your favorite, but could we just try this one?”
- **Choice: Try using visual cues to offer two possibilities or one choice with something else as the other option (rather than open-ended questions)**
“Do you prefer cooking or baking?”
- **Short and Simple: Give only the first piece of information**
“It’s about time for coffee...”
- **Step by Step: Only give a small part the task at first**
“First, open the envelope.”

Other phrases to try:

“I remember when...” (note: this is very different than saying “Don’t you remember...”)

“I remember when I was little and you baked cookies with me.”

“Tell me about...”

“Tell me about Christmas Day when you were young.”

“I’m wondering...”

“I’m wondering what your favorite thing about Hanukkah is?”

“Sounds like...”

“Sounds like you’re feeling pretty lonely today.”

Even though nothing is quite the same as being able to be with someone you care about in person, finding ways to connect over phone or video chat can be very valuable. Whether you are separated due to geography or the pandemic, it is worthwhile for both of you to seek those moments of connection and joy.