

The Fine Art of Visiting

One of the biggest challenges of the volunteer experience is in knowing what to say and do as well as how to say and do it... and when!

Maintaining a comfortable level of conversation which is enjoyable and of interest to yourself and the resident is a challenge. It takes time and patience to establish rapport. Be creative; use the same skills you use with your friends and families. Don't be shy. It takes time to make new friends.

You don't have to talk all the time. Patience is required and silence is actually a very good thing! Some people don't need lots of activity but may be very satisfied to simply have someone present. Just *being* with a resident is in itself a gift that is valued.

Residents of the Lodge have experienced many losses which have resulted in their residing with us. Many experience boredom, loneliness and a sense of helplessness as a result of their age-related issues and concerns. Your visit makes a difference!

As you seek to share your time and talents with residents, here are some important ideas to ponder, activities to try and things to be aware of or avoid.

If at any time you are struggling with your visits – please speak with the TR Staff who can offer suggestions and feedback to make your experience beneficial to both you and the residents you visit.

VISITING DOs:

- √ Always knock on the door, introduce yourself, and indicate that you are a volunteer in a respectful, professional manner. Then ask if the individual is up for a visit.
- √ Position yourself in a way you can be seen and heard clearly by the resident.
- √ Be yourself, smile and know you really make a difference.
- √ Become a good listener. Most residents will really enjoy sharing their life experiences with you.
- √ Share some information about yourself. Find out what you might have in common.
- √ Enjoy tea time together.
- √ Pamper their hands with a manicure, lotion and a nice massage.
- √ Share an interesting article or anecdote.
- √ Take a resident for a walk around the Lodge or Courtyard, weather permitting. Always check with staff first and sign the resident in/out (inform reception) as appropriate.
- √ Read the newspaper and brush up on current events—discuss trends, fashion, food, childhood.
- √ Play a game together (checkers, crib, scrabble, etc).
- √ Play the piano for the resident.
- √ Be a friend!

VISITING DON'TS

Out of respect for residents, while you are visiting please do not:

- X** Sit on the bed unless otherwise directed
- X** Initiate discussions about a resident's diagnosis, illness or injury. Let the resident initiate such discussions. Keep in mind that anything they may disclose is confidential.
- X** Answer questions, or express opinions about a resident's diagnosis or condition. (Refer any questions to the staff person in charge).
- X** Use the individual's room as a place to rest or an excuse to watch TV. Remember your focus when volunteering is the person you are visiting. Their interests and needs come first.
- X** Discuss controversial subjects with the resident and his/her family. An example of this could be unwelcome religious discussion.
- X** Overstay your visit just to get 'hours in' – if a resident indicates they are tired or asks you to leave, please respond immediately
- X** Offer legal, financial, family or medical advice to resident or families. The role of a volunteer is to be a good listener.
- X** Carry on long conversations with other volunteers while on duty.
- X** ...expect to hit a homerun on your first visit! Trust takes time 😊

Conversation Starters:

Every conversation has to start somewhere! Most of us start with the weather.... Here are a few suggestions to get the ball rolling.

1. **Always introduce yourself.** Even if you have met before, most residents have some form of memory impairment (that's why they are with us!) Never expect someone to remember you or your name. Let it be a pleasant surprise when they do!
2. Flattery will get you everywhere. **Start with a compliment.** Often leading with an observation – admiring the color or outfit that someone is wearing, noticing they have just had their hair done, admiring a picture or unique belonging – each of these can trigger a great opportunity for conversation.
3. **Bring something meaningful.** Sometimes, especially when you have established something in common, bringing something to 'show and tell' about can further build the relationship and provide great tools for visiting.
4. Be prepared to listen if you use the standard **"How are you today?"** When you ask – expect to LISTEN to the answer. Listen both verbally and non-verbally. Acknowledge what is said and show you are paying attention. When people have visual, hearing or other deficits they rely both on what they *see and hear*.
5. **Ask the staff for pertinent details.** Often staff can give you some pointers about the person, their history, interests and experiences. Use some of these details for conversation starters. BUT, be prepared to change the subject if someone indicates they do not wish to discuss your chosen topic.
6. **ASK...** put the visit in the resident's hands. Be open, willing and flexible – residents will have their own topics to discuss whether you are familiar with them or not. Be prepared to listen, learn and ask questions appropriately.

Remember, a person-centered approach means just that: the resident is your first priority. Take your time – building *any* relationship takes time.