

Caregiving Corner

Resources & Solutions for Caregivers

Gift Giving During the Holidays

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It is hard to believe, but we have found ourselves again looking at the calendar as the months draw closer and closer to the holiday season. For many of us, it means a frantic search for the perfect gifts, attending holiday parties, and tying up loose ends before a brief period of respite at the end of the year. For caregivers, just as with parents, there are additional things to be thinking of when you are caring for someone else. Caregivers often provide important services for their loved ones during the holidays such as gift shopping, transportation to other family members' homes, and many other time-consuming tasks. Caregivers often find that Christmas shopping creates two challenges – (1) how to find the best gift for the person you are caring for and (2) how to assist your loved one purchase gifts for others on either a limited budget or with little time to select items.

There are no fair generalizations to make about older adults – except to say that they are all different! For this reason, the idea that one category of gifts is more appropriate for them is erroneous. However, there are many older adults in retirement, assisted living, or nursing home environments who are limited by space as to what type of gifts are practical. These older adults are often noted by caregivers as being the more difficult group to purchase gifts for. Here are some things to keep in mind when purchasing holiday gifts for older adults who either have everything or who don't have the space for much more.

First, there is never anything wrong with buying practical items. Many caregivers feel like they spend the rest of the year purchasing Depends, socks, toothpaste, and other basic items, so they avoid those items during the holidays. The need for those items never goes away, but most people don't feel that toiletries make for exciting gifts during the holidays. One caregiver recently shared with me that she purchases toiletries as she usually does, but then she adds some extra items, like packages of cookies, or nice smelling lotion and packages everything into a gift basket. Sometimes presentation does make a difference. The problem with steering too far away from the necessary, more practical items is that sometimes gift selection ends up being inappropriate for the recipient. An older adult who receives a box of chocolates, but does not enjoy candy is a good example of a poor gift selection.

Second, keep in mind the amount of space the older adult realistically has for additional tabletop items or photo frames. For older adults who have downsized, they have already gone through the process of trying to eliminate many items and trinkets in their home and the additional gifts could become merely clutter. For people who fall into this category, gift certificates are an excellent selection. Keep in mind, too, that gift certificates aren't just for shopping – they can be for car care, services, groceries, and trips – just to name a few things. While they used to be considered impersonal, gift certificates now make up more than \$1 billion

of holiday season purchases each year and are used for just about any service or product.

Caregivers will often assist their care recipient purchase gifts for others during the holidays, a task that can sometimes place a financial burden on caregivers. As you are helping the person think of gifts to purchase, don't overlook the traditional contributions that your loved one has made to the holiday season, such as baking, that might serve as a nice gift. Assist them with the food preparation if they need the help rather than feeling like they must now purchase gifts if they are unable to cook by themselves. Likewise, older adults are usually the members of the family who have old photographs of their parents, grandparents, etc. If these items are going to be passed along to younger family members, why not pass them along for a Christmas gift? Another idea might be an item that an older adult has earmarked for a family member to receive after their death – it is much nicer to see the family member enjoy the gift and that idea can save you both time and money. As we approach the Christmas season, remember that many people feel that gift-giving is an important way to feel that they are a part of the festivities. If the older adults in your family feel this way, try to think of some creative ways that you can help them, without stressing you or them! And when selecting the gift for the person you provide care for, remember that no matter how small the gift is that they will open during the holidays, the gift of your care and patience sustain them each day of the year.