

THE CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM

NEWSLETTER

Caregiving During the Holidays: Have a Realistic, Positive Approach

Carol Bradley Bursack

There's an image of holiday perfection that our culture encourages. Starting with Thanksgiving, we are inundated with images of families happily enjoying each other's company during an idyllic holiday meal. Most of us have childhood memories that feed this desire for Norman Rockwell-esque celebrations. Even those who didn't have these picture-perfect experiences growing up often strive to create them with their own families.

However, few of us can measure up to the fantasy—caregivers least of all. The vast majority of advertisements, music and blockbuster movies sugarcoat the holidays and shirk the reality that most of us face. These images feed expectations that are simply impossible to meet.

Today's "average" family is vastly different from those of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. These days, our families are often comprised of many generations, relations, races and creeds. For family caregivers, elders' various health problems, care needs and living situations add to the complexities of bringing everyone together for the holidays.

None of these factors stops families from celebrating, though, and they shouldn't. It's just that we tend to carry memories of holidays past close to our hearts. We place a lot of pressure on ourselves to meet or exceed these high expectations, especially for the enjoyment of our youngest and oldest generations. If we don't feel we've succeeded, we end up feeling guilty. In many caregivers' minds, failing to meet expectations is failing, period. It's time to turn this mindset around.

My kids were fortunate to have their grandparents nearby as they grew up. Along with creating cherished memories with Grandma and Grandpa, however, they also witnessed their elders' failing health. They remember dividing the holidays between visiting loved ones at the nursing home and celebrating at our house with those family members who could still manage to come over. Unfortunately, I'm sure they also remember my frantic struggle to meet the expectations of every generation with only limited success.

Each year after Thanksgiving, I would make my rounds, decorating each elder's apartment or nursing home room, planning how we would split our time between the visits, and striving to meet everyone's needs. The guilt over taking so much time from my kids ate at me. The guilt over my mother not having the Christmas celebration she so coveted ate at me. My mother-in-law did not seem to care, yet I knew that deep down underneath the dementia, she did. The frustration of trying to "celebrate" when my dad no longer knew what we were trying to do made me want to throw in the towel. Yet, to ignore or minimize this time of year seemed all wrong. Yet, to ignore or minimize this time of year seemed all wrong. Onward I marched, trying to make the holidays sing for people who couldn't hear.

The squeeze of generations and the countless needs of each leave little time for caregivers to think of their own needs. Members of the sandwich generation know this dilemma well. Prioritizing our own health and enjoyment winds up feeling like just another task, so we knock it to the bottom of the to-do list and keep on doing for everyone else.

But it takes energy to plaster on a grin and say "happy holidays" as people in the grocery store greet you. It takes energy to decorate a loved one's home, bake cookies, attend holiday performances, shop and wrap presents—all with a smile, of course. Eventually, you sit back and realize you don't really feel like smiling at all. Despite all your selfless effort, each person still did not get enough of your time. Page 2

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CSP Team Spotlight: Heather Twitchell

Heather has been with the Caregiver Support Program since 2019 - first working as a case manager, then a Senior Support Specialist, and was promoted to our 2nd supervisor position this past October. Heather brings to FBH over 20 years of healthcare experience! Heather is a huge Marvel Comics fan, so you can bet she'll be at the first showing of any upcoming Marvel movies! Her favorite superhero is Wonder Woman.

Continued from Page 1... Everyone feels shortchanged, including you. All that energy directed toward creating a perfect holiday didn't produce the perfect results for everybody. In your mind, you failed and the guilt is all-consuming. You can carry on the tradition this year and run yourself ragged all winter trying to make a holiday miracle happen, or you can drop the perfect fantasy and lose the caregiver guilt.

5 Holiday Tips for Caregivers

Reset the computer in your head. That's right. Wipe out the hard drive that carries holiday memories of the past. The perfection you remember is likely skewed anyway. The circumstances back then were very different, and it's time to celebrate the holidays in a new way that fits your life as it is right now. There's nothing wrong with reminiscing, but drawing unfair comparisons between this year and past holiday seasons will only set you up for disappointment.

Watch a silly holiday movie. I'm serious—laughter is therapeutic. Find a funny, imperfect and touching holiday movie like "Elf" or "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" and make it a part of your celebration each year. Years ago, my youngest son and I started watching "Merry Christmas, Mr. Bean" each Thanksgiving. The tradition began after we experienced deaths in the family over the holidays two years in a row. After the second holiday season spent grieving, I still remember my son saying to me, "I hope we don't have a funeral this Christmas." We didn't. However, we did again the following Christmas. Throughout our funeral-strewn holidays, we watched "Mr. Bean" at least once. Somehow this character who lives in his own little world is able to create his own happiness. When he tries to live life like other people, he fails. But when he is true to himself, he is happy. There's an important lesson there.

Be thankful. In most cases, before we can be thankful, we have to accept where we are in life. Often there are circumstances that we would love to change and many that we never anticipated, but it's where we are. If we accept it, then we can work our way toward expressing some gratitude. Maybe this gratitude is only that we are learning and growing from our hardships and setbacks. But even slight feelings of appreciation can help improve our attitude and help us see what is really important.

Communicate with your loved ones. Even small children can understand—if they are told in a loving way—that your time is short or you have to cut corners because Grandma and other family members rely on you, too. Communicate the same thing to the elder(s) in your care. Helping the entire family understand that each person's desires are important to you but that you have a lot on your plate can help keep their expectations more realistic. You'd be surprised how much a senior, even one who has dementia, can understand. The holidays are about giving and sharing out of love. Having this conversation with the family may even inspire them to lend a hand or cause your elders to encourage you to spend more quality time with your kids and grandkids.

Simplify your plans and enjoy what truly matters. Forgive yourself for the scant decorations, the online shopping and the skipped Christmas cards. In fact, congratulate yourself! Remind yourself that your health and sanity are a gift to your loved ones. By skimping on some of the frills, they will have more quality time with you. That is far, far more important than a Norman Rockwell Christmas.



Affordable Connectivity Program



The Affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC benefit program that helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more.

The benefit provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price. The Affordable Connectivity Program is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per household.

Who Is Eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program? A household is eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program if the household income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or if a member of the household meets at least one of the criteria below:

- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year;
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income internet program;
- Participates in one of these assistance programs:
 - Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program
 - SNAP
 - Medicaid
 - Federal Housing Assistance, including Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program (Section 8 Vouchers), Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA)/Section 202/ Section 811, Public Housing, and Affordable Housing Programs for American Indians, Alaska Natives or Native Hawaiians
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - WIC
 - Veterans Pension or Survivor Benefits
 - or Lifeline;
 - Participates in one of these assistance programs and lives on Qualifying Tribal lands: Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, Tribal Head Start (income based)

Two Steps to Enroll: Go to [AffordableConnectivity.gov](https://www.AffordableConnectivity.gov) to submit an application or print out a mail-in application then contact your preferred participating provider to select a plan and have the discount applied to your bill.

Funny Stories - Caregiver Forum

Marlo Sollitto

Caregiving is one of the most challenging jobs on earth—it can be both rewarding and defeating at times. A family caregiver's emotions can quickly cycle from the highest highs to the lowest lows and back again. This responsibility can be overwhelming, but many family caregivers credit their unyielding optimism and sense of humor with the ability to power through even the toughest trials.

The Caregiver Forum at www.agingcare.com/Caregiver-Forum receives countless stories from family caregivers throughout the United States and even the globe. Contributors and caregivers alike laugh, cringe and cry with one another as they share their unique experiences caring for aging and ill loved ones. Here's a glimpse of some of the humorous elder care stories from real family caregivers like you.

"Yesterday, I came home from work and Mom came out to the kitchen to greet me. I said, 'Mom, you have on my sweatpants!' We each have a pair of the same soft, comfy green sweats, but hers are a size 14 and mine are a few sizes bigger. She said, 'I thought I had lost a lot of weight!' Then she pulled up her shirt to show me that she had pinned the pants to her bra to keep them up! We had a good laugh!"

–Patti4Mom

"I was kneeling beside Mom's bed last night while she was saying her bedtime prayer. This night she prayed, 'Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray he takes me like an earthquake.' The last part should be, 'I pray the lord my soul to take.' I questioned her rendition and Mom laughed and said, 'Well, I couldn't remember the rest and... well, it rhymed!' Amen!" –lighthouseido

Skin Care - Pressure Sores

Pressure sores (also called decubiti, or bedsores) are blisters or breaks in the skin. They are caused when the body's weight presses blood out of a certain area. How much time they take to heal depends on how advanced they are.

The most common areas for sores are the bony areas—tailbone, hips, heels, and elbows. The skin breakdown starts from the inside, works up to the surface, and can happen in as little as 15 minutes!

Damage can range from a change in color in unbroken skin to deep wounds down to the muscle or bone.

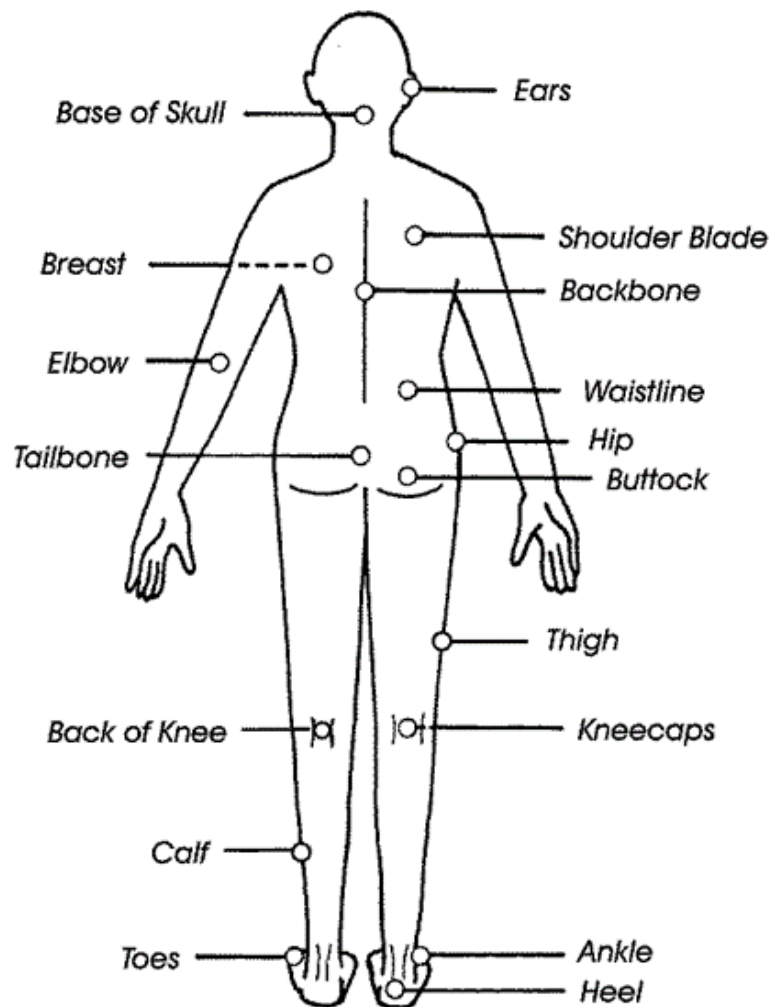
For people with light skin, in the first stage of a bedsore, the skin color may change to dark purple or red and does not turn pale under fingertip pressure. For people with dark skin, this area may become darker than normal.

The affected area may feel warmer than the skin around it. Pressure sores that are not treated can lead to hospitalization and can require skin grafts.

Tips for preventing pressure sores

- Provide exercise as much as possible.
- Check the skin daily (Bath time is ideal).
- Keep skin dry and clean (urine left on the skin can cause sores and infection). Use an ointment or barrier cream to help protect the skin.
- Keep clothing loose.
- Avoid using a plastic sheet or disposable bed-pads if they cause sweating.
- Provide an egg-crate or sheepskin mattress pad for added comfort.
- Use flannel or 100% cotton sheets to help absorb moisture.
- Provide a well-balanced diet, with enough vitamin C, zinc, and protein
- Provide an egg-crate or sheepskin mattress pad for added comfort.
- When the person is sitting, encourage changing the body position every 15 minutes.
- Use foam, gel or air pads on chair seats to cushion the buttocks.
- Change the type of chair the person sits in; try an open-back garden chair occasionally.
- Turn a person who cannot get out of bed at least every 2 hours. Change the person's positions. Smooth wrinkles out of sheets.
- Lightly tape foam to bony sections of the body using paper tape, which will not hurt the skin when peeled off.

Where Pressure Sores Can Appear



Skin Care - Edema

Edema is swelling or puffiness of parts of the body. It is caused by water that is trapped in body tissues. Edema usually happens in the feet, ankles, and legs. It also can affect the face and hands.

Many things can cause edema. Sometimes gravity pulls water down into the legs and feet. Sitting in one place for too long can cause edema of the legs. Eating food with too much salt, which causes the body to retain water, can make the problem worse.

Congestive heart failure and liver, kidney and thyroid diseases can cause edema. Edema cannot be "cured." The only way to treat it is to treat the condition that is causing it.

To keep the swelling down:

- Put a pillow under the legs when lying down.
- Wear support stockings.
- Do not sit or stand for too long without moving.
- Follow the doctor's orders about limiting the amount of salt eaten.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP



SUPPORTING YOU WHILE YOU CARE FOR A FRIEND OR LOVED ONE!

EVERY 1ST AND 3RD WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH

2 PM - 3:30 PM

5125 N MARKET STREET
SPOKANE, WA 99217

QUESTIONS?

509-458-7450 OPTION 2
CAREGIVERSUPPORT@FBHWA.ORG

Caregiver Support Program - Frontier Behavioral Health Funding provided by Aging & Long Term Care of Eastern Washington

FREE ONLINE CAREGIVER TRAINING

CareLearn Washington, funded by the Mental Health Transformation Initiative, provides family caregivers, as well as all other eligible direct care workers, access to over 300 hours' worth of high-quality, DSHS-certified continuing education opportunities and caregiver-related training content.

By utilizing this free service, caregivers can increase their general knowledge on prevalent aging and health related topics such as dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and COPD. Simultaneously, caregivers may also improve their hands-on skills by watching videos on titles such as Assisting with Personal Care, Managing Challenging Behaviors, or one of the many specialty trainings designed to provide the end user step-by-step instructions on task completion.

Visit www.carelearnwa.com to learn more about eligibility and the training content offered through the online platform.

CARE  **LEARN**™
Washington

Holiday Brain Teaser

$$\text{Candy cane} + \text{Candy cane} + \text{Candy cane} = 27$$

$$\text{Candy cane} + \text{Snowflake} = 19$$

$$\text{Candy cane} + \text{Gingerbread man} - \text{Snowflake} = 7$$

$$\text{Gingerbread man} + \text{Snowflake} + \text{Candy cane} = ?$$

Candy cane = 9; Snowflake = 10; Gingerbread man = 12;