

News

Including seniors in family traditions is important

By Christie Netherton Messenger-Inquirer

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In the hustle and bustle of holiday gatherings, seniors who have experienced isolation this past year and a half due to COVID-19, especially those who are memory impaired, might have more likelihood to become overwhelmed.

However, according to Jennifer Williams, Green River Area Development District director of social services, it is still important that they feel included and get to remain a part of family traditions.

It is important, therefore, to ensure seniors are comfortable in large family gatherings and to check to see if they are OK with physical touch — such as hugs and other close contact — especially those who may still be uncomfortable getting out as much, she said.

“The noise level and the hustle and bustle might be a little more unnerving than it would have been before, when they were mixing with people more often,” Williams said. “That’s important to just be aware of and to make sure they’re comfortable.”

For those seniors who may be memory impaired, she said it is important to stick to a routine as much as possible.

“Holidays have no routines,” she said. “Things are crazy and wild, but try to keep some sort of routine in their world, making sure they’re not overstimulated. At the same time, it’s a delicate balance between overstimulation and making sure that they’re not left out and that they still get to be a part of family traditions and gatherings.”

Especially important, she said, is to not put memory impaired seniors in awkward situations with someone who they may not remember or have not seen in a while.

If a senior loved one starts to become confused or irritable with noise and commotion, Williams said it is a good idea to get them into a room that is more peaceful and quiet and maybe engage them in an activity that is familiar, whether that be simply washing dishes or setting a table.

Additionally, she said seniors with memory impairments should always be treated with dignity and respect when experiencing some confusion.

“Even though we might know they might not have the right information, there are respectful, dignified ways that you can maybe correct them,” she said. “Back when I first started 30 years ago, they talked about reality therapy, that you always need to bring them back to reality and the here.

“Now, then finally, through the years, they have discovered and are now teaching that is not the way to go. All that does is upset a person and embarrasses people if they get things wrong. Their reality is their reality.”

Williams said that overall, it is mostly just important to make senior loved ones feel involved.

After all, she said, they are who brought the family into being and have upheld family traditions for many years.

“I want to encourage people to not forget about seniors and their family members,” she said. “Be sensitive, particularly with early stages of dementia, to the fact that they know things are not quite right, and we want to maintain their dignity and be respectful.”

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