

The Family Friend

A collection of articles and quotes to aid your family in daily living.

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Why Some Seniors Aren't Smiling This Season

Season's greetings can be found everywhere at this time of the year. In fact living out the seasonal optimism would be a feat! Many of us look forward to the exchange of gifts, sharing of food and fellowship with family and friends. Unfortunately, most of us don't give much thought to those for whom the holiday season isn't "holly" or "jolly."

Perhaps it could be the colder temperatures taking a toll on your loved one's temperament. Or, maybe the pressures of hosting, cooking, shopping and gifting could make you feel stressed. While seasonal pressures and depressed moods are common for most of us, seniors who experience these symptoms for an extended period of time could be going through something grave.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal affective disorder (also known as SAD) is characterized by depression-like symptoms that occur dur-

ing the winter months. SAD is not to be confused with a much milder condition that is usually linked to specific seasonal stressors. According to a National Institutes of Health study, SAD is linked to body rhythms that have lost sync with the rising and setting of the sun. Other research suggests reduced exposure to sunlight is to blame.

Seniors are more likely to experience these symptoms, as depression can also occur with many aging-related conditions. Fortunately, SAD, like other forms of depression, is treatable. And, while medication therapy is one viable option, a very common treatment for SAD is light box therapy—a lamp designed to emulate sunlight.

Winter Blues

Last Minute sales, family dinners and charitable activities can add to an already long checklist of "things to-do." This all adds to our holiday stress. Remember, prolonged episodes of stress should be addressed by a primary care provider; he or she can create a stress management plan to help your loved one better manage times of tension.

A Hiatus on Healthy Habits

Winter weather brings warm, cozy thoughts. Some of us can get too comfortable with staying in, forgoing exercise and its benefits. This could also be a key reason for a depressed mood.

Exercise is especially essential to seniors. Not only does it help improve strength and flexibility, it can also bring positive mood changes. When the weather proves prohibitive to outdoor physical activity, joining a fitness center and investing in home exercise equipment are practical options.

Remember, there are indoor activities such as "mall walking" and classes, some specifically designed for seniors or those with limited mobility, and your local Parks and Recreation Center. These are all good for burning off calories found on holiday dinner tables.

Other Tips to Stay Optimistic

- Spending time with family can give seniors opportunities to talk about their issues with someone. Sometimes, talk therapy is needed to make it

through what seems to be the season's darkest moments.

- Visiting a senior center or joining a group exercise program are great ways for seniors to stay social and active during winter months.

- Keeping a journal is a good way to keep track of depression symptoms and signs of uncontrolled stress. A daily log of mood swings and emotional moments can be helpful to a primary care provider. He or she can create a personalized plan to help restore seasonal joy. Because of this time of the year, peace of mind is the best gift to give oneself.

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Two Good Forgivers

Robert Quillen was a journalist and humorist in the early part of the twentieth century. He left behind many quotable lines, but this has to be among the best

A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers.

There's no way to make life work without forgiveness. We've all been offended, and we've all committed offenses.

There's no way to receive forgiveness from God without graciousness. Jesus said, "...if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:15).

In the latter part of Ephesians 4, Paul identifies several Christian behavior traits that are the polar opposites of Gentile practice. The last quality he discusses is forgiveness. *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you"* (32).

The necessity of forgiveness cannot be rationalized, compromised, explained away, or avoided. It's one of those practices that sets Christians apart from the secular counterparts.

Marriage provides life's most practical workshop for the development of a forgiving spirit. So how do we make it happen? Here are a few practical suggestions.

1. Don't go to bed angry. We know you've heard that one before. Touch and affirm before you go to sleep. You'll sleep better and things will look better in the morning.

2. Don't be too proud to apologize. All husbands and wives do and say thoughtless, cruel, inconsiderate, and self-serving things. "I'm sorry" doesn't make it right, but neither does stonewalling.

3. Give a little. To us a relationship between two married people becomes a bond between two good forgivers when both are willing to give up opinions, plans, dreams, and ideas about how to do things. If you approach

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marriage with the "my-way-or-the-highway" attitude, you're probably going to see lots of asphalt.

4. Forfeit the right to be right. Someone recently asked, "Aren't most marriage disagreements about money?" We'll concede that money is often the excuse for battle, but the war is over who's right. If we could be a little more interested in "what's right" and "what's workable" we might be surprised how much our marriages will improve.

Don't be so hard nosed. We both admit to stubbornness, but when we cling to our hardheaded assumptions, we shut down helpful communication. There's a part of Paul's instruction we sometimes overlook. He said, "Be kind." Kindness is not an indication of weakness.

We don't guarantee our suggestions to work. But how well is your current communication style working? If you're at such an impasse that no one will budge, no one will admit to being wrong, no one will apologize, and no one seems to care, you might want to develop a different game plan. We think ours has potential. Who knows? Maybe the two of you will become good forgivers..

—Norman and Ann Bales