

How to Stay Involved in an Aging Parent's Life

Have you found as your parents have aged that more time is spent helping them and less time spent socializing with them?

Helping maintain their home, picking up groceries and driving them to medical appointments are tasks we may take in stride. We are happy to help them as they helped us grow up. It's easy to slip into a pattern where all our time with our aging parent is spent running errands instead of creating new memories. You may fear that your parent is becoming socially isolated from friends and may be spending too much time alone.

A loved one's physical condition may put limitations on performing certain social activities but more often it is our own work and other family obligations that get in the way of making time. The simplest of activities can be the most enjoyable and can open up time for good conversation and social engagement.

7 ways to shake up the routine

Is your parent a lover of books? Libraries and independent bookstores invite authors in on a regular basis. These free events offer a chance to read a book and discuss it and the author's talk. Consider a family book club and engage middle school or high school grandchildren. Plenty of young adult fiction today is also popular with adult readers. Choose a book together and schedule a time to discuss it over pizza.

While many a grandparent tries to keep up by attending soccer games or other extracurricular

activities, a book club discussion around the dining room table might beat sitting wrapped in blankets at the side of a soccer field. More importantly, talking about a book opens up opportunities to discuss so many topics and possibly gain insights into each other's lives.

Enjoy music together. Everyone has favorite music that they enjoy. Find time to listen to old favorites together and explore why a particular artist or style of music holds good memories for your parent. You may unearth a story you have never heard before.

Share a hobby together. Perhaps you and a parent both enjoy knitting or quilting or a hobby like woodworking. If diminished eyesight or arthritis prevents your parent from working on a project, they might enjoy helping you with one.

Spend time in the kitchen. Make a family favorite recipe together and learn why it has been the cookie or soup that has been handed down from one generation to another. Is a grandchild a bit of a foodie? They might love to learn some secrets from a seasoned baker or home chef.

Drive to the old neighborhood. Do you live near where your parent grew up as a child? Or has your parent moved from a favorite home years ago? Take a walk or drive around the neighborhood and see what stories get told.

Turn a shopping trip into something more. Even a trip to the shopping mall for new socks offers an opportunity to do something fun. Take a walk in the mall for good exercise and stop for

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tea and conversation. Bring the grandchildren and play a quick game of cards.

Help organize a brunch with your parent's friends.

Losing connections with people of their own age – church acquaintances, bridge foursome, lifelong friends — can easily occur when older adults no longer drive. While organizing a lunch so your loved one can reconnect might be challenging to coordinate, it would be very much worth the effort.

As we get older, staying active with others helps us focus on what we can do, rather than on our limitations.

*This article is a reprint of a blog
posted by Wendy Chossek,
Laureate Group's Lifestyle Consultant*