

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

Promoting Leisure-Time Activities

The senior generation didn't just embrace the American work ethic; they embodied it. Year after year, decade after decade, they took great pride in giving an honest day's work for an honest day's wages. Then they retired. Abruptly, that precious and rare commodity known as free time filled their lives. What were they supposed to do? Some took awhile to adjust to their new state of life. Others acted like the proverbial kid set loose in the candy store.

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--Temporary shutdown: this is being a couch potato, which just about everyone enjoys from time to time, although obviously it's not good when it fills up an entire schedule

--Time alone: this might be reading or "people watching"

--Creative time alone: this would include activities such as knitting or carpentry projects

--Service: this is simply volunteer work

--Socializing: this is spending time with friends, family, and others for personal enjoyment

While a recent retiree may find a satisfying combination of the four for a while, that initial burst of enthusiasm doesn't always last. Then, too, as the years go by, declining health may mean adjustments have to be made.

Here are some recommendations for what you can do to encourage your care-receiver to keep active:

--Understand why your loved one may be doing less. It could be that an illness has become the focus of his attention for a time, but as he begins to feel better, or to adjust to his new circumstances, his old hobbies will start to appeal to him again. If not, it's important to know that a lack of interest in the things

that used to give him pleasure is one of the symptoms of clinical depression.

--Keep in mind that sometimes a care-receiver may hesitate to continue a favorite pastime because it's not going to be the same as it was before. Maybe she played cards with a group of friends for years, and now she's the only one who hasn't moved away or died. Playing with new people just isn't the same for her. After all, it wasn't the card game that mattered; it was the companionship. And even though your loved one may want to make new friends, she hesitates. Won't they also just move on or die? She may think, I'm too old to make new friends.

--Ask what he or she wants to do. Help your loved one by asking, "What is it you've always wanted to do?" Encourage him or her to dream big.

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--Help your care-receiver get whatever supplies, equipment, or instructions he or she may need.

Check out what resources are available in the community. Some community colleges offer classes for seniors at little or no cost. Senior centers provide classes, activities, meals, and socials. Explore with your care-receiver what type of volunteer work he or she might enjoy doing. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), an organization that helps seniors get involved in their communities.

--Be careful not to pack your loved one's schedule from dawn to dusk. Remember: the point is to encourage, not to dictate or overwhelm.

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For a free copy of "The Little Book of Caregiver Prayers," call the Friends of St. John the Caregiver at 1-800-392-JOHN (5646). For more caregiver topics, visit www.YourAgingParent.com.

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