

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

The Need to Have Fun

When you're caught up in the worries and demands of taking care of a loved one, it's easy to overlook how important it is for your care-receiver to do something enjoyable. No matter how old we are, our emotional health depends a great deal on fun. Pleasurable activities are especially important when illness, depression, and grief dampen our spirits. Unfortunately, sometimes when we need those good times the most, they're the first things we eliminate.

Finding and suggesting something that will be enjoyable for your care-receiver isn't always easy. It can take imagination, work—and diplomacy.

Put fun on the schedule. Finding something enjoyable you two can do together on a daily or weekly basis, and then sticking to a schedule, will give your loved one something to look forward to.

These are some suggestions:

--*Ask your loved one what he or she would like to do for fun.* It's important to ask, but realize that your question might be met with a less-than-enthusiastic response. When we're out of practice, having fun can seem like a foolish idea. Whatever idea you come up with, no matter how great it may be, it could take quite a bit of persuasion over an extended period before your care-receiver is willing to give it a shot.

--*Generate some ideas.* What did your spouse used to like to do? Travel? Collect? Play sports? Read? Listen to music? What was her ideal vacation? What were her plans when she first retired? Obviously the time to do some of those things has passed. She won't be touring Europe. She may not be up to attending plays at the local college. The challenge, then, is to find another way for your care-receiver to continue to enjoy what has interested her.

--*Gently encourage and help.* If Dad used to love to go to museums, find out what art books and

videos are available at the library. Keep an eye out for television programs that are going to feature an artist whose work she especially admires. If it's going to be broadcast at an inconvenient time, record it.

--*Do it together.* Go through the book or watch the tape *with* your loved one. This is especially important. The point is not for you to hand her a book or put in a DVD and then disappear. The point is for the two of you to talk about what you see. For that thirty minutes or hour, your care-receiver once again can become an amateur art critic. She can enjoy a pastime that gave her so much pleasure when she was younger. And she can share that with you.

--*Be creative.* If your husband loved to read murder mysteries, read one out loud to him for fifteen or twenty minutes several times throughout the day. If he was an avid sports fan, make a point of being there with him to watch some games on television. ("Go" to the Super Bowl together.) Make a friendly wager. If his diet will allow it, serve a halftime meal of hot dogs and beer. Decorating the room with sports paraphernalia will add to the experience.

--*Do it often.* Put fun on the schedule. Finding something enjoyable you two can do together on a daily or weekly basis, and then sticking to a schedule, will give your loved one something to look forward to.

--*Yes, it's corny, but don't let that get in the way of your fun.* A lot of what ends up being fun can seem corny in the beginning. It might be silly, but it could also be just what you and your care-receiver need to forget about those worries and demands for a time and simply enjoy each other's company.

Lord, Teach Us to Play

Dear God, when did having fun become so hard? But now with doctors, appointments, tests, and pain, it's so easy to forget. Lord, teach us how to play. Amen.

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