



# **ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY**

(A Division of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy)

*"Helping with life's most precious relationships"*

## **Family Day Activities for Younger and Older**

Our family stretches over four generations from the youngest at nine months to the eldest, in her ninetieth year. On this first Family Day, February 18, 2008, youngest and oldest will celebrate with a brief visit to the nursing home where my mother has made her home for the last two years.

Children are welcomed by seniors and are frequently admired and enjoyed by all the residents, whether they are family or not. Many ask the same questions several times a visit. This is part of the charm. Everything old is new again. Visiting does not require endless creativity.

If you have hesitated to mix the generations when visiting nursing homes, hesitate no more. Children can be remarkably perceptive and appropriate when given the chance. Don't deny them this wonderful learning and sharing experience.

Develop traditions to make your visit happy for all concerned. Family Day might be some simple adaptation of normal rituals. Children and seniors enjoy routine. Here are some of the ideas we use to keep things interesting:

- Give each child a job to do. Older children can key in the pass code and push wheelchairs. Risk it.
- Younger children can carry flowers or treats.
- Babies can be cuddled.
- Keep a small tea set, a colouring book and crayons and small toy cars in your senior's room. He/she will play along with a pretend tea party and enjoy crayoning with the older children.
- Stage a real tea party in the activity room or designated family space. Chocolate milk and cookies from home and real cups from a treasured collection are always welcome.
- Older children and teens may bring schoolwork and art to show. Your senior may not understand the subjects, but may still recognize an A at the top of a page!
- Sing songs. Musical memory remains when faces seem unfamiliar and names are long forgotten. 'Twinkle, twinkle little star,' 'Row, row, row your boat,' and 'The ABC Song' are ageless favourites.
- A small amplifier in the room is useful to help small children communicate with a hearing impaired relative. They enjoy speaking into a mike and may sing special songs or recite poetry. Don't press a reluctant performer. Rejoice that he/she is present.
- Spend time looking at old pictures or scrapbooks. Stop when interest falls off. There is no agenda to get through.
- Children, middle-aged and otherwise, are happy to stroll through points of interest in the residence; take a visit to see birds, fish tanks and waterfalls; examine changing art and seasonal displays; visit the laundry or peer through glass windows at the kitchen.
- Sometimes a visit requires nothing much more than being present. When you visit alone, crawl up on the bed (health concerns permitting) and cradle your senior while he/she sleeps. This is a rich time for both holding on to what is most precious in the relationship and of letting go of things which are no longer possible.