

Cornucopia

By Nan Hayes for Caring Transitions®

Holidays are an opportunity for families to come together in celebration. Over the next few months you will hear a great deal from advisors and [elder care professionals](#) who suggest we use this time of family gathering as an opportunity to evaluate our parents' well-being, to advance discussions about [housing options](#) and [long term care insurance](#); to take a closer look at mom's "[activities of daily living](#)" or to hold a "[parent conversation](#)" with dad. Much of this advice should be heeded to an extent, as it is undoubtedly a valuable exercise for families to gain a clear understand their parents' plans and wishes for the future.

The professionals suggest we pepper dinner table conversation with well-placed, open-ended questions such as "Where do you see yourselves 3 years from now?" Or "What is your favorite holiday memory?" And many of us will do just that, in the hopes of giving our parents a chance to share their plans and their legacy.

We hope to gain something from these conversations, a little guidance, a little insight. The responses to our questions may not always be what we want to hear but since it's the holidays, we will try our best not to criticize or pass judgment or force our opinions on others. We will sit back in our chairs and really listen and then, when we have the opportunity, we will share some information with our parents as well.

What kind of information? We could tell them where to get help with [downsizing and decluttering](#) or how to find more information on [local senior living](#) options. We can try and give them financial advice and share the latest about the [health of the housing market](#). Or, more importantly, we can tell them what we love about them. We can share favorite stories of past family gatherings and thank them for their commitment to us. As adult children with children of our own, many of us have a great new understanding of just how many hours dad spent hanging holiday lights or putting toys together at midnight. We can finally truly appreciate how much effort mom put into filling stockings, making holiday meals, baking cookies and wrapping gifts. This year is the year to thank them and to share our best memories of them *with* them.

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We can present our parents with a virtual cornucopia of good memories and gratitude for all they have done. At this particular time of life, when constant worry over their health and welfare threatens to define our relationship, we have an opportunity to redefine it with caring and with commitment.

Commitment. There is probably no better way to express gratitude to parents than by affirming our commitment to them. Reminding them that we are here for them, at any hour, without any inconvenience, with no threat to their independence and nothing but respect for their lifestyle, wishes and choices. Commitment means letting them know they remain a priority in the midst of busy schedules and hectic lives. And commitment means letting them know that while our relationship dynamic may change a little, we do not believe “the child becomes the parent and the parent becomes the child.” We will continue to respect them as our parent, always.

In 1990, a Japanese woman founded an unusual enterprise. Noticing that many elderly Japanese were increasingly isolated from their children by the frantic pace of contemporary life, she established a company where lonely older adults could “rent a relative.” Surrogate sons, daughters or grandchildren could be rented to show up at the door and gush as if they haven’t seen the client in years. They’d stay for a long chat, share concerns, sip tea and possibly perform some minor repairs around the house. Many thought the business was sure to fail, but instead, thousands hired the service and the business was a great success. When asked why she believed the business had taken off, the owner said “What is common about our clients is that they are thirsty for love. They all reach an hour in their life where they cry out to the people they need and when the response doesn’t come, they finally pick up the phone and call us.”

Commitment means letting your parents know they may have to hire [home care](#), maybe even health care, but they will never have to hire a family.

The late ethicist Lewis Smedes said it well, “Commitment means reaching into unpredictable times and making one thing predictable, that I will be there. I will throw myself into uncertainty ...and create the certainty of my caring presence. “

From all of us at Caring Transitions, we wish you and your family a safe and wonderful holiday season.

Visit us online at www.CaringTransitions.com.

Call Caring Transitions for a Consultation – (800) 647-0766

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