



from the Family Home
to the Nursing Home

*How to Ease the
Transition Through
Rituals*

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The first weeks in a health care center can be the most difficult.

Inside this booklet you will find some suggestions to help you and your family member feel more comfortable in their new home.

Establishing rituals can help this process along.

Please use this booklet to help you find rituals that provide meaning and connection for you and your loved ones no matter where their home is.

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Rituals Help Adjustment to New Home

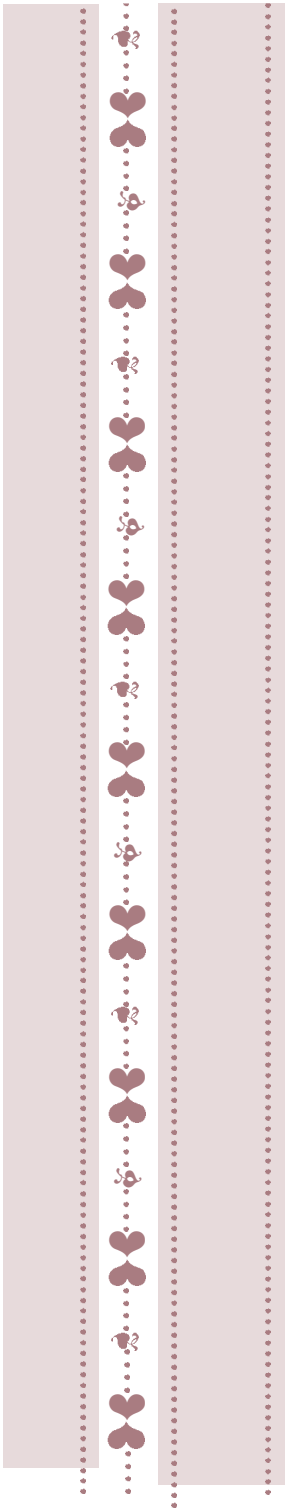
Having a family member in a health care center can be a difficult experience. Deciding that a loved one must move to a nursing home can be one of the most heart-wrenching decisions a person can make. One method of coping with life transitions that has been used by people throughout the world is rituals. Baby showers, adoption days, engagement parties, graduations, weddings, retirement parties, and funerals are all examples of rituals that sanctify our shared humanity. They can make and mark major transitions through life. During transitions we are vulnerable to the life change that includes some losses and challenges. We use rituals to acknowledge the change, recognize the loss and give us the courage to embrace what is new.

Why Rituals Can Help

Acknowledging major transitions can help us to stop and understand the implications of these changes, as well as alert the larger community to the shifts and

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bring in their support. They shape our relationships, help to heal our losses, express our deepest beliefs, and celebrate our existence. Rituals are often extended family and community events where major arrivals, departures, and milestones in a family are witnessed and supported by a social network.

As families have changed, life cycle events have changed, too, and rituals have not always kept up. For instance, getting divorced or gaining new stepchildren or stepsiblings are more common in families now, yet few families have a ritual life to help incorporate these shifts. Rituals enable us to begin to rework our sense of self and our relationships as required by life's changes. The lack of such rituals can make change difficult.

To respond to this void, many families are becoming more intentional about finding ways to mark these events. When no ritual exists for an important transition we can *create a new ritual, or adapt an old one*. Creating a new ritual or adapting an old one to mark the move of a loved one into a health care center can be a healing thing for the family and person making the move.

Some Possible Ritual Events

One family marks the opening day of the baseball season.

In years past they had the opportunity to attend the home opener in person. Now that is not a possibility. They bring a picnic, along with baseball caps and beer, to the health care center and watch the game together.

The traditional housewarming party could be held for the new resident at the health care center.

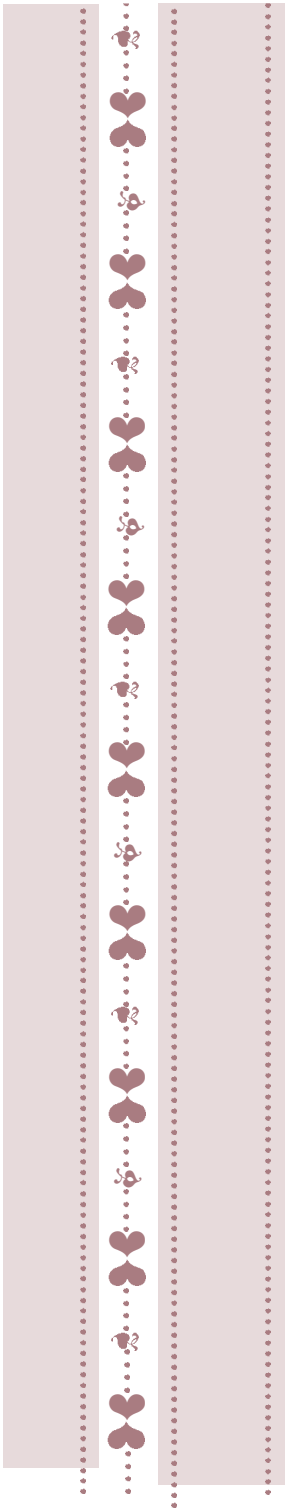
Invitations could be sent and the room decorated festively and a special food prepared. This would be a welcoming event for those people who may be uncomfortable with visiting a health care setting. People can mark their calendars and make a special effort to attend a party.

If the resident is religious, you may want to have a religious leader come and bless the new home. They may be able to offer a special service for the resident and family at the health care center. Using something familiar like a church service can be moving and healthy.

Bringing nature to the health care center can be a rewarding thing for

Creating new rituals or adapting an old one can be a healing thing for both the family and the person who is entering a health care facility.





everyone. If the resident was a gardener or farmer, an indoor garden may be a wonderful hobby. Have a gardening party and ask your guests to bring a packet of seeds for planting in a pot. An herb window garden may be an easy addition to any room. If the health care center has some outside garden space, you may want to ask if they would allow you to have a planting party for vegetables and flowers. The invited guests could bring cuttings or new plants. After the harvest, you could invite everyone back for a feast!

You can adapt a previous ritual to the new circumstances. One family takes all their family Christmas tree decorations and a Christmas tree to the health care center where they reserve a party room and decorate the tree with the whole family participating.

Food is always a popular focus for a celebration. Did the resident enjoy cooking or eating a particular food? During the apple harvest time you could organize an outing to an apple orchard and pick apples. Have your guests bring the ingredients to the health care center to assemble and bake a fresh apple pie. If you make enough, you could share the pie with the other residents and staff.

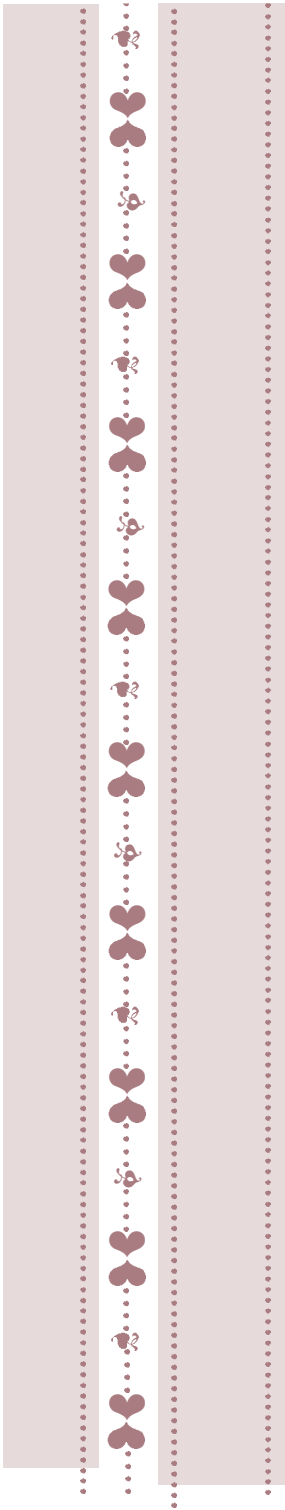
How to Proceed

The planning time that precedes a ritual can be as important as the ritual itself. Some things to think about in planning a personal ritual~

- How would you most like to mark this transition?
- Who are the people you would like to gather to witness the event?
- Think about how to include people, who will be part of the preparations, and where people will gather.
- Think of ways to invite people so they will feel genuinely welcomed. This may draw some people to the health care center who have been reluctant to visit before.
- Is there a document or certificate that would help mark the change?
- If someone can't come, see if they want to send a toast or other words to be read, or if they would like pictures or a video of the event.

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☛ Rituals seem to work best when people have some choice in how to participate in a way meaningful and comfortable for them. Think of ways others can contribute so they will feel more involved.

☛ Think about how to begin and end the ritual. You may want to move to a special area, use music, or a prayer or blessing, a toast, or a drum, or ribbons, special food, flowers, or a special cloth that is meaningful for the participants.

☛ As you plan, be sure to leave some aspects of the ritual open and unplanned, since this is where rituals' magic will emerge - unanticipated relationship connections, a new sense of self, brief memorials to heal losses during celebrations, and expression of deeply held values.

On-going Rituals Are Also Important

On-going rituals help frame visits and recreate family life which strengthens relationships. Their repetitious quality powerfully tells us who we are to each other. They shape and express family relationships, beliefs and values. The rituals help provide shape and expectations to your visits at the health care center. Here are some suggestions of activities to do when visiting that may enrich your time together. *Many were shared with me by family members.*

You can decorate and keep up a bulletin board in the resident's room with pictures of the season, photos of family members, or old photos that bring back pleasant memories. One caregiver decorates the door of her father's room with a nautical theme: anchors, ships and flags. Because of his navy background, it catches his eye and helps him find his room. She also regularly makes him his favorite special Czech lunch of stuffed cabbages and fresh strawberries. They share the meal, memories, and a game of cribbage.

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Keep up a family photo album.

One caregiver has a family photo album with separate sections for each branch of the family. Family members are encouraged to send photos throughout the year and together they put them into the album. The resident can use these to visit with other residents, staff, friends and volunteers.

Participating in the activities of the health care center can provide you with many rituals. One caregiver and her husband would take her mother to the on-site ice cream cart during their visits, until it closed. They needed more volunteers to run it. They missed it so much they decided to volunteer once a week staffing the cart. They got to enjoy the ice cream, and her mother got to know more residents. They were able to create a niche for her in her new home.

Some caregivers have a guest book that friends can sign to record any wishes or thoughts they want to share.

Some have put up a bird feeder that attached to the resident's window. This is a conversation starter with everyone.

Some who are religious find that reading the bible together, singing hymns, or praying the rosary is comforting to them.

Leaving the health care center and your family member may be difficult for everyone. Some find it helpful to *leave their visits with the same message each time*. One says, "Jesus loves you." Another says, "God bless you and keep you safe."

Rituals

A Special Bulletin Board

Special Meals

Photo Albums

Participating in Center Activities

Guest Book

Bird Feeder

Spiritual Activity

Special Goodbyes

TV Activities

Housewarming or Garden Party

Christmas Tree Decorating

Sports Activities

Blessing of the New Home



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provide shape and
expectations to your

visits with your

loved one.



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We offer a wide variety of services to help seniors in
Dakota County remain independent.

~DARTS Social Services~

Grocery Shopping ~shopping assistance provided by
volunteers

Friendly Visiting ~companionship and support for
homebound seniors

Medicare Assistance Project ~help with medical forms

Caregiver Support Services ~resources, friendship and
volunteer help for those caring for the frail elderly at home

Volunteer Respite Care ~volunteers to stay with frail seniors
while their family caregiver takes a break

Chore Services ~help for low-income seniors

Meals on Wheels Coordination ~assisting seven
independent community programs providing nutritious
meals for seniors at home

Chemical Dependency Counseling ~meetings,
companionship and support especially for seniors

Independent Living Program ~services for residents of Nan
McKay & John Carroll

Partners in Eldercare ~connections to DARTS services
through your doctor, hospital or nurse

Home Share ~matches senior home owners and renters

Senior Linkage Line ~answers about the many other services
for seniors

~DARTS Volunteer Resources~

Volunteer Opportunities ~for people of all ages

~DARTS Transportation Services~

Senior Transportation ~door-to-door service for Dakota
County residents

Service for persons with disabilities ~extended hours
service for ADA certified riders; transfers to Metro Mobility