



Helpful Guidelines to Successful Visits

A LITA friendship, like any other, takes time to develop. Above all, it requires honesty, a sense of humor, and compassion. In addition, the following suggestions may be of assistance to you in establishing this important new relationship.

Ask your friend how he or she would like to be addressed. "Shall I call you Mrs. Smith, or may I call you Rose?"

Be considerate. Remember that the room in the facility is your friend's home. Ask permission to come in and sit down. Let your friend retain his or her dignity by being able to invite you and by still being in command of his or her own space. It is a state regulation in S.N.F.S. to knock before entering a resident's room.

What to do if your friend is sleeping. Gently call out your friend's name. If they do not wake up, find a nurse or CNA to help you. They will know if your friend is ill and needs to sleep, or naps often during the day and would be upset if they missed your visit. If your friend is often asleep, finding a better time can help.

Be attentive. We do not encourage LITA volunteers to have more than one friend at a time. LITA is a one-to-one program, and your friend should be very special. Remember, you may be the one person who comes just to see your friend. Many LITA volunteers develop other acquaintances along the way. It is all right to stop and talk with others, as long as you let your friend know you are really only there to visit with him or her.

Give what time you can comfortably. Many volunteers choose to spend more than the required hour a week with their friend. However, if you need to leave after 20 minutes but find you have trouble getting away, plan to start your visit a half an hour before mealtime, and use the meal as your reason to leave. It is better to keep it short and sweet than to feel resentment because you cannot get away. On the other hand, if you find you have an afternoon to give and your friend enjoys a long visit, by all means stay!

Be a good listener. Accept your friend as he or she is. Some days will be better than others. In our society today, when relationships between people seem to be growing ever more impersonal and dehumanized, there is a great need for listening. Because listening seems to be purely passive, we don't realize it can be an act of kindness. There are many occasions when it is the most helpful thing you can do for your friend.

Maintain open communications with your friend.

Be patient. Don't rush anything or show annoyance with your friend's slowness.

Take your friend seriously. Regardless of seemingly confused speech or thinking, try to listen deeply, past the layers of confusion, to hear what your friend is attempting to say to you.

Ask your friend for advice. Most individuals are flattered by such a request and appreciate being needed.

Restrain from offering advice. Another essential aspect of the art of listening is the ability to suspend moral judgment and restrain the impulse to offer advice. Often, as in the case of a grieving person, there is no way to "solve" the problem. To listen, to hear, and to understand shows that you care, accept, and love. This can be of immense value to your friend.

Ask questions. Allow your friend to reminisce.