



PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

LITA volunteers find the time they spend visiting with their friends in Skilled Nursing Facilities, Residential Care Facilities, and Retirement Residences most rewarding. These people literally have their lives changed and their self-images improved tremendously. Our goal is to bring happiness and a better quality of life to the residents. Adhering to LITA's procedures and guidelines will help you make that happen.

1. Being a LITA friend means making a commitment to genuinely care about your resident friend and dedicate at least one hour each week to visiting him or her. The length of visits may depend on your friend's health on any given day. Be aware that an hour may be too long if your friend is tired or ill.

2. Let your friend know when you will be coming to visit and be sure to keep your appointment. It is best to work out a definite schedule and to visit at the same time each week. However, not everyone can operate that way; it is alright to be flexible as long as your friend understands. If an emergency, illness, or unexpected travel makes a scheduled visit impossible, be sure to notify your friend of the change through the activity director of the facility. While you are not able to visit, notes and cards to your friend are much appreciated.

3. You are not expected to attend to the physical needs of your friend. His or her room is equipped with call buttons for staff assistance when necessary. A helpful phrase to learn is, "Let me find someone who can help you."

4. HIPAA regulations make it hard to know your friend's allergies or illnesses. Do not bring food, flowers, cigarettes, alcohol or over-the-counter remedies (i.e., Tums, Maalox, aspirin, vitamins, or personal items). State law allows only doctors to prescribe medicines. It is important to remember that you are a friendly visitor, not a service provider.

5. Transporting of friends is not the responsibility of LITA.

6. Please sign in each time you visit your friend. Check to see if there is a LITA Volunteer Sign-In book or if you sign in with the facility visitor sign-in. It is important for you to sign in when you visit to keep the facility in compliance.

7. If your friend complains, it is important for you to determine the severity of the problem. If you have concerns, please contact the facility staff person you met on your initial visit, usually the activity coordinator or social services designee.

8. Be sure to respect confidentiality. Any personal or medical information shared with you by your friend or the staff is to be kept confidential. Facility staff is bound by confidentiality also. There are state and federal regulations prohibiting disclosure of certain information.

9. LITA volunteers are not to be involved with the residents' financial or legal matters i.e., paying bills, balancing checkbooks, handling personal property, etc. If your friend has concerns about these matters, ask the facility staff for assistance. There are many legal ramifications for you as a volunteer.

10. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) went into effect April 2003. This Act ensures federal protection for the privacy and security of health information. LITA has an agreement with facilities that volunteers will be informed of the regulation and sign an agreement to comply with it. A six page explanation of HIPAA is included in your LITA volunteer orientation package.

11. Be sure to wear your LITA name tag on each visit. It is important for staff and residents to know who you are. Always contact the LITA office if you need a new name tag.

TB TESTING

Due to an increase in the cases of tuberculosis, it is now required by law that volunteers entering facilities be tested for exposure to TB. During your initial interview and orientation, you are provided with local information regarding being tested.

If you have been vaccinated against TB or know that you routinely read positive, please ask your regular physician to supply the LITA office with a note verifying that you have had a clear chest x-ray taken in the past seven years.

RELIGION

While many LITA volunteers are devoutly religious and actively participate in the affairs of their own faith, LITA is not a religious organization. LITA is non-sectarian. However, you are free to discuss religion with your friend if it is appropriate and by mutual consent.

ADVOCACY

Although LITA is not an advocacy group, each LITA volunteer in fact is a personal advocate for his or her resident friend, working quietly behind the scenes to make life better for that friend. LITA sometimes is confused with the Ombudsman program. Ombudsmen are objective mediators who help residents, their families, staff, and community members in resolving questions, problems, and complaints concerning long-term care facilities. The Ombudsman program is federally-mandated and funded by the Older Americans Act.

CLOSURE

Our resident friends already have suffered many losses, such as their home, independence, health, family and friends. Be sure you do not carelessly add to their losses by leaving them abruptly. If you must stop visiting for any reason, be honest about it with your friend.

A logical reason can always be found to explain why you are no longer able to visit. And almost any reason is better than just stopping with no explanation. Older people can accept, "My new job keeps me so busy," or, "I don't get enough sleep because of the baby." They then can say to themselves, "My friend can't come anymore because....," not, "What's wrong with me?" or, "I have been abandoned."

If you move away, tell your friend that you are moving and try to send a card occasionally saying you are still thinking of him or her. It is extremely important to make a proper closure if it becomes necessary to end your visits.