

## New Ways to Connect: Activities to Share with Your Loved One

By Cassandra Van Dyck



You likely have some sort of routine with your loved one, even if it's not set in stone. If you are a caregiver living with your spouse, you might start the day with a cup of coffee or tea and listen to the news, or do a crossword puzzle. If your care partner is physically able, you might go for a short walk in your neighbourhood. Maybe you visit your parent or family member a few times a week, and drive them to appointments or make lunch for them at home. Having routines and rituals can be grounding, and often provides much needed consistency when times are hard. Sometimes, however, we can get stuck in routines, doing the same thing over and over again. You might feel limited by your loved one's abilities or fear that they or you are not capable of doing something new. It can be scary to do something outside of your comfort zone, but the rewards can be huge. Trying a new activity with your loved one could be inspiring for both of you, and you might create new, revitalizing friendships.

Summer is the perfect time to break free of routines that are keeping you stuck and to try something new. The weather is warm and the days are long. Here are some ideas for ways to connect with your loved one.

### GO FOR A WALK

If you're physically able, try exploring a new walking path. Search for easily accessible trails, and plan ahead for bathroom breaks if needed. Many trails are wheelchair accessible! Don't let your loved one's mobility stand in the way of getting some fresh air and seeing some new views. Plan to visit a new walking path 1-2 times per month, to keep things interesting. Talking with your loved one about places they'd like to explore can be a great way to connect and get excited about a new adventure – even if it's just a little one.

### JOIN A GROUP

Look in to options at your local community centre and connect with other people who have shared interests. Maybe there's a bridge club, or a bingo night. Perhaps a library close by has movie viewings or book clubs. If you're concerned about your loved one's ability to thrive in the group, look in to accessibility options. If you're still worried, try it out! You might find the group's not a great fit for you and your care partner, or you might be surprised. It can be refreshing to take up a new interest, which keeps your brain active and can bring some welcome surprises. A shared activity also gives you and your loved one something new to chat about. We've listed some local organizations at the end of this article to help you connect with groups and new activities.

### PLAN A MINI VACATION

Remove the idea from your head that a vacation has to cost heaps of money. At this time of year especially, a vacation can cost very little, or even nothing! Pick a sunny day and plan to stay at the beach until the sun sets. Pack a dinner of easy-to-eat foods, such as cheese, fruit, crackers, and maybe dips like hummus or tzatziki. Splurge on an ice cream cone! The key to enjoying the mini vacation is to treat it like you would a big vacation. Take away the distractions of daily life and forget about your responsibilities for a few hours. Turn off your phones and leave chores for another day. If you and your loved one have been feeling consumed by conversations about health or planning for the future, make an agreement that you will not talk about any of it during your mini vacation. Think outside the box when deciding what to do and where to go. Planning the time together might be almost as fun as experiencing it! Is there somewhere you and your loved one have always wanted to go, or something you've longed to do? Maybe it won't look the way you'd planned it years ago, but it's possible to make it happen in a smaller way. For example, spending a few hours at a French café drinking coffee and eating macarons in lieu of a trip to Paris, or a visit to the Bloedel Conservatory instead of a plane ride to the tropics.

When you shift your focus from what you can no longer do with your loved one to what you can do, doors open and opportunities present themselves. Grieving the changes in your relationship is a natural and common part of the caregiving journey and it is important that you both feel you have an outlet and support for those emotions. Finding new ways to connect is not about ignoring the changes that have and will occur, it's about sharing new experiences together so your relationship can continue to grow and flourish. As a caregiver, it can also be helpful to connect with other caregivers. Finding new people in similar situations will give you support and a community of folks who can help you think about new ways to support and relate to your loved one.

### LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

#### **North Van Recreation & Culture**

<https://www.nvrc.ca/>

604-987-Play (7529)

**Silver Harbour Seniors Centre**

<http://www.silverharbourcentre.com/>

604-980-2474

**West Vancouver Seniors Activity Centre**

<https://westvancouver.ca/parks-recreation/community-centres/seniors-activity-centre>

604-925-7280

**Parkgate Community Services Society**

<http://www.myparkgate.com/seniors/overview/>

604-983-6376

**Tsleil-Waututh Nation Elders Programs**

<https://twnation.ca/for-our-community/for-our-members/community-services/>

604.929.3454

**Squamish Nation Elders Centre**

<http://www.squamish.net/contact-us/administrative-offices/>

604-987-4646

*“When you have once seen the glow of happiness on the face of a beloved person, you know that a man can have no vocation but to awaken that light on the faces surrounding him. In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.”*

– Albert Camus