



How to choose the right activities for elders

It's fun to plan activities that involve older family members and friends. Unfortunately, elders are sometimes left out because of certain frailties or impairments, or simply because they are older. Rather than excluding them, choose activities that suit their needs while providing enjoyment for the entire group.

Many elders have excellent health and are able to participate in nearly any activity to which they are invited. Some, though, may suffer certain physical, sensory or mental impairments and should be invited to participate in activities that suit their individual needs.

Before planning an outing, ask a few questions to discover what challenges they have. These needs will change in time, but they will help you to know what to avoid and which ones to try. Here are some activities to consider depending on their level of ability:

- **Elders with minor physical impairments** may still be able to participate in activities that require a suitable amount of exercise. Some ideas include gardening, fishing, bean bag toss, light yoga, dancing and nature walks. Always consult a physician if there is any doubt about the elder's physical ability.
- **For elders with significant physical impairments**, choose activities that require a minimum of physical exertion, such as card games, movies, indoor picnics, sharing stories, etc. Activities should focus on their abilities, not their disabilities.
- **For elders with mental impairment**, such as a slowing of brain function and/or memory loss, consider activities such as sharing conversations, going for walks and singing songs. Choose activities that allow them to use their cognitive abilities, but that are not so complicated as to confuse or frustrate them.

No matter the level of activity, involving an elder relative or friend in your plans allows them to know they are loved and valued.

Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly has provided one-on-one companionship services, advocacy and social activities for isolated and lonely older adults in the Twin Cities since 1972. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, LBFE has been recognized by the Charities Review Council for meeting its 27 Accountability Standards. More information about LBFE can be found at littlebrothersmn.org.

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