

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Please read the following two letters. My response will be to both of them since I feel they are related to each other.

Q. Dear Miriam,

This is our first year experiencing the empty nest syndrome. Our children are away, but more to the point, no one will be coming home to celebrate the holidays. This is also a first.

We know we are not the only parents going through this, but we are not feeling good about it.

We feel stuck in our negative outlook.

Can you suggest some ways in which we can make this a positive holiday experience?

Empty Nesters

Q. Dear Miriam,

My mother is in a nursing home.

The holidays are coming and I find them painful and difficult since my mother entered the nursing home. While the nursing home and community make efforts to celebrate with Jewish residents, I would like some suggestions on making the holidays more meaningful for my mother and more important to the younger generations of my family. I want them to embrace the importance of celebrating with older relatives. I know one day I may be the older mother in the nursing home.

Can you offer any ideas?

Holiday Planner

A. Dear Letter Writers,

For many families, holiday celebrations have been much more than a religious experience. It has been a time for families to come together to share all of the experiences of the past year, to share the births, to mourn the deaths, to observe the growing children, to celebrate simchas. Not having that experience is a loss whether it is because children have moved on or because of the necessity of moving into a nursing home. To keep that experience alive we need to create new traditions that fulfill the need and complete the meaning of celebration.

Empty nesters can offer to share their homes and celebrations to new people in the community, to single parent families, to other empty nesters. There is joy in celebrating the holiday with others and there is satisfaction of mentoring others to help them build their own traditions. Empty Nesters can also offer to share themselves by becoming "family" for people in nursing homes who don't have families living nearby.

If you are able to visit your own family member in a nursing home, create your own traditions with him/her that help to bridge the loss of family that he/she may be experiencing. Bring the family with you in person or bring pictures to share. Personalize a calendar with pictures for each month. Have family members make videos in which personalized messages are sent. If possible, share a meal with familiar foods. If appropriate, bring together friends in the nursing home who can share the celebration.

You need to stress the importance of visiting, calling, sending pictures, etc. to the younger generations. We too often "save" the younger generations from the "burden" of connecting to older relatives.

Connecting to older relatives should be a family tradition that passes from one generation to the next.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. Please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail madler@jfsneny.org or call 518-482-8856.