

Are We Losing the Art of Conversation and Companionship?

Facebook, Twitter and all the other various forms of social networking are a clear demonstration that people of all ages value a sense of connectedness. These cyberspace giants, along with cell phones, text messaging and e-mail, have essentially replaced the good old days of relaxing on the front porch, enjoying an ice-cold glass of lemonade and having a face-to-face conversation.

Technology is both a blessing and a curse. While some people are technology savvy, others do not use or have access to a computer and see no need for a cell phone. As the Wall Street Journal article *How Facebook Ruins Friendships* (August 25, 2009) put it, “I love you all dearly. But I don’t give a hoot that you are having a busy Monday,” and your child “took 30 minutes to brush his teeth.” While technology ideally brings us closer and more connected to one another, it seems that face-to-face conversation and the importance of companionship are fast becoming a lost art.

We find that most of our clients and their families initially place a low value on companionship. In fact, when we are speaking with prospective clients, conversations tend to focus on the more tactical aspects of care with little regard to the relational aspects.

Home Helpers makes life easier for clients by helping with activities of daily living, but for people who live alone, companionship is also very important. People who are used to the company of their spouse or a significant other often find it uncomfortable to be alone for an extended period of time. Being alone may be a pleasant change every once in a while, but over time, isolation and boredom can set in. Every creak or noise in the home can be unsettling.

Frankly, many of our clients place tremendous value in the presence of a caregiver. Be it a feeling of safety or peace of mind, a voice of encouragement, someone to reminisce with, participate in activities with, or simply having someone to lend a helping hand, life tends to be more enjoyable when it is a shared experience.

While companionship is an underappreciated benefit of caregiving, many older adults crave social experiences and the chance to interact with others. Even with many baby boomers who now use technology to share photos, exchange messages, or hear a loved one’s voice, there is something to be said about companionship and face-to-face conversation.

When making personal visits is not feasible, family members still wish to remain informed and up-to-date on the situations involving their loved ones. Home Helpers recently joined forces with GenerationsUnite to help facilitate communication. GenerationsUnite is an easy-to-use web-based tool that allows families, Home Helpers and family caregivers to communicate regularly and create a true network of support around the care recipient.