

Family & Friends

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It is easy to imagine how hard it is to move to a new place with new people. But what about those left behind? They, too, can feel lost, sometimes bereft, often guilty and insecure as well as lonely. This is particularly hard if they were the person's main carer and, naturally, continue to care and worry about them. A central and important role for you is to help residents maintain their relationships with the people who matter to them.

SUPPORT FOR RESIDENTS' PRIMARY FRIENDS AND FAMILY IS A LEGAL REQUIREMENT

Care homes must assist service users and those acting for them to understand and discuss the care choices, to express their views as to what is important to them and where reasonably practical, accommodate these views, as specified under *The Health & Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014: No 9 Person centred care, No 11 Need for consent, No 16 Receiving and acting on complaints, No 17 Good governance*

Welcome to our home

All the evidence stresses how much difference it makes to carers and residents when family and friends are welcomed and included in the life of the home. Of course the resident's wishes should always come first. But even when residents cannot express their preferences easily, they still want their nearest and dearest to stay involved in their care.

Try to get to know who's who, so you understand how they fit into each other's lives and they build up trust in you. A friendly approach, offering refreshments when people visit, makes them feel valued and welcome.



BUT HE'S MY FRIEND

When Patrick moved into a care home, staff made his friend, Joseph, feel really welcome, involving him in the home's activities and events. But noticing Patrick withdrawing, Maria, the Activities Co-ordinator suspected Patrick missed sharing time alone with his friend. Later Patrick thanked Maria for noticing and helping him move to a quiet spot to catch up with his old friend.

Contributing to care

Often residents have strong ties with family and friends. The happiest outcomes can be when those who know them best are involved in their care planning and their day to day care and support. Encourage them to join in activities or meals with the residents. They may take a resident out or help to widen their friendships in the home. Some may contribute their talents and practical skills to events at the home.

GOOD COMMUNICATION













Research has found that where staff have received training in communication skills with family members, the family's satisfaction in the care provided increases, while conflicts reduce. Staff also found they had better understanding of family dynamics and carers' needs. (SCIE Research Briefing 34, 2010)

Communication is key

It is really appreciated by everyone when staff realise how much it matters to all those involved in the resident's life to be told what is going on.

Good communication starts with listening and understanding each person's viewpoint. Some relatives and friends may need support and encouragement to stay involved or speak up. They need to know they still matter and play an important part in the person's care.

Keynotes

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GOOD PRACTICE

Mr Blake didn't like to complain, especially not to his son, Eric, who rang regularly but lived abroad. So when Eric got the email from his care home inviting him to discuss his dad becoming withdrawn, he was both surprised and grateful. Having had a number of chats with his dad's key worker, he suspected the cause might be his hearing deteriorating. The care home arranged for Mr Blake to see an audiologist and Eric brought his trip to the UK forward.

Having clear channels of communication between friends and family and the home means that concerns or suggestions can be shared and understanding can develop. Setting up a relatives and residents forum can be an effective way of discussing a range of topics, possible improvements, or to advertise social events.

People who matter to the resident should be involved in reviews of care needs and kept in touch with any changes, such as medication, or personal or health needs.

Staying in touch

Good communication is just as important with family and friends who live a long way away or cannot visit. They need to be kept in touch with the person's situation, of any problems or changes in their health, mood and mobility by phone and email. Sharing your knowledge will help them know what to expect and avoid possible shock if they do visit after some time. They should be told of hospital appointments or changes in medication and may also appreciate reassurance over activities the person still enjoys.

Representing residents' interests The person closest to the resident will want to be involved in reviews of their treatment and care. They may be able to help the resident understand why changes are needed and make decisions, while remembering that the resident's choices come first. Some family members may have legally defined decision-making roles as Court Appointed Deputy or Lasting Power of Attorney for the person and those rights must be observed.

Sharing concerns

Take time to listen to concerns from family and friends. If you are very busy when they raise something, agree another time and follow it up. Always explain who you will report it to, so they will know who will be dealing with it. Be clear about staff responsibilities, so that everyone – staff, visitors and residents – knows who to speak to. If you are uncertain, ask senior staff for help.

Some people will become distressed when a resident's condition is getting worse and will need your extra support or a kind word acknowledging their situation.

Treat feedback positively. Friends and family can help with raising questions and anxieties as well as possible improvements, also in suggesting how relatives can support one another.



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