

Making a Difference

**Building positive relationships
between care staff and residents**



A guide for care home managers

Introduction

We all know that positive relationships between residents, care staff and relatives are at the heart of good care. As a manager, you have a vital role to play in nurturing the positive interactions which lead to these close relationships.

This guide provides you with an introduction to a relationship-centred approach to care and ideas for putting it into practice in your care home.

It is designed to accompany the guide for care staff, which offers **practical ideas** for engaging with residents and **getting to know them** when undertaking their care work. The care staff guide can be used as an



induction tool as well as a **resource for ongoing training**. You may want to suggest your staff keep it on them for reference and try a **new idea each day or week**.

You and your staff have many demands on your time, and it can often feel like there aren't enough hours in the day. That's why we've made every effort to suggest **simple, practical ideas** which **can make a big difference**.

There are many benefits to adopting a relationship-centred approach. Over time, **your residents will be more contented and settled**, so staff will spend less time reacting to distressed behaviour. It can **help your residents to maintain their life skills**, preventing falls and **reducing dependency** on care staff. Staff will also have **more job satisfaction**, which means **increased staff retention** and **productivity** and **reduced absenteeism**. Finally, a care home where residents, staff and family members all enjoy their time together will support you to achieve **higher CQC ratings** and occupancy levels.

Staff look to you to communicate the ethos and culture of your care home, so **your role** in supporting and modelling this approach is **crucial**. We hope you will find these guides useful in creating a **positive culture in your care home** where your residents live **happy, fulfilled and purposeful lives**.



A Relationship-Centred Approach

As well as meeting a person's physical care needs, caring for others is also about **seeing, understanding and relating to residents as individuals** with social, intellectual and emotional needs.

In a task-focused approach, care staff focus mainly on all the tasks they have to get done, e.g. getting residents up quickly in the morning. Residents in these homes are more likely to show distressed behaviour. **Relationship-centred care** involves **positive interactions between residents, relatives and staff**, creating a thriving and **supportive community**. Residents and staff **enjoy their time together**, and **staff feel positive about their work** and more in tune with residents' needs and wishes.

These relationships need to be nurtured with activities and positive interactions. That is where **you, the manager, play such an important role**. It is you who can ensure that care staff see care tasks as opportunities for engagement and activity, and have the skills, motivation and confidence to connect on an emotional level with residents. **A relationship-centred approach is crucial for people living with dementia**, who are most vulnerable to isolation and loneliness. The care staff guide provides ideas for engaging successfully with these residents

If **staff feel valued**, this will be **reflected** in their **approach to work**. If **residents feel valued**, this will be **reflected** in their **attitude to life**. If everyone feels valued, the home will be buzzing with community spirit and camaraderie.



“If everyone feels valued, the home will be buzzing with community spirit.”

Good relationship-centred care:

- **Staff use their time carrying out care tasks to engage with and get to know** their residents, and understand what interests them and brings them pleasure and joy.
- **Whenever a member of staff passes a resident, they acknowledge and engage positively** with each other e.g. with a word, a smile, touch or wave.
- **Staff use their time with residents to talk to them about their own lives**, and bring into the home items of interest to residents. They develop a strong bond with the residents from getting to know them.
- **Residents feel they are understood and valued** by care staff, who are interested in them as individuals.

The benefits of this approach:

- **Residents are happier, more fulfilled and purposeful**, with a rich quality of life. Maintaining their life skills also reduces their dependency on care staff and can prevent falls.
- **Care staff have greater job satisfaction** and the confidence to contribute ideas and think creatively. This often leads to increased staff retention and productivity, and a reduction in absenteeism.
- **Distressed behaviour is less likely** when residents feel valued and understood. Frustration, irritation and aggression can, in part, be caused by a lack of good communication, understanding and engagement. Staff will also be better placed to calm distressed residents if they have good relationships with them.
- **You will be able to recruit high quality care staff**, by emphasising high levels of meaningful and rewarding engagement.
- **Having high levels of meaningful activity and engagement** in the home will support you to achieve **higher CQC ratings** and meet local authority commissioning objectives.
- **Creating a welcoming environment will encourage family and friends** of residents to contribute positively to the life of the home. Visitors will see happy and engaged residents, helping you achieve high occupancy in your care home.

“Residents are happier, more fulfilled and purposeful, with a rich quality of life.”



Putting it into practice: promoting a positive culture

Here are some ideas for **motivating your staff** to engage with residents:

1 Lead by example – learn residents' names and get out of the office as often as you can, if only for a few minutes at a time. This can be as simple as greeting and stopping to chat to a resident.

2 Encourage staff to bring their talents and interests into the home. If somebody enjoys singing or plays an instrument, encourage them to do this with residents. If a member of staff comes from another country, perhaps they could bring in photographs or items of interest. Support your staff to make suggestions and take the lead.

3 Reinforce the idea of positive social interaction. Role play can be a useful tool to show the different experience of a resident when you approach an activity in a positive or negative way. Try using this 10 minute training session of 'offering toast': Staff take it in turns to be a resident or staff member. Try offering toast to the 'resident' while feeling negative (e.g. rushed, frustrated), then do the same with a positive mind-set. Ask your staff how they felt as the resident in both scenarios. ◀ See Resources page 8

4 Show you value your staff and acknowledge the importance of their role. Recognise and celebrate efforts with small rewards e.g. an annual award (for positivity or relationship-centred approach) or acknowledgement of good ideas (e.g. idea of the week).

“Support your staff to make suggestions and take the lead.”

5 Encourage staff to work together: e.g. if you have an Activity Coordinator could they provide training or activity materials for care staff, and could care staff take part in group activities? Ensure you have a budget for activity equipment and memorabilia.



6 Enable staff to have one-to-one time with residents without having to complete a task. If care staff have access to a smart phone or tablet, encourage them to use it with residents to explore the internet (for meaningful places, images, pieces of music etc).

7 Discuss regularly what is/isn't working well, the barriers, and the solutions. Make activity an agenda item in appraisals, supervision and meetings with staff, residents and relatives. Establish a **suggestion book/box** for residents, staff and relatives.

8 Recognise the natural leaders amongst residents, staff and relatives. Encourage them to share ideas, and support them to put these into practice.

9 Grant your Activity Co-ordinator(s) (and/or care staff who share this role) some status and a degree of authority - this will send a message to all staff about activity being essential to residents' quality of life.

10 Recruit care staff who understand the importance of relationship-centred care. Include meaningful activity in all job descriptions. Make it clear that interaction and activities are an expected part of carrying out care tasks.

The Environment

Here are some ideas for personalising your home to reflect your residents' lives and interests:

1 Encourage residents (and relatives) to have photos and personal items in their rooms.

2 Provide staff with a budget to decorate walls and create environments that reflect residents' interests and provide opportunities for interaction and activity.

3 Invite residents to choose pictures or other items for communal areas.

4 Encourage staff to create rummage and memory boxes. A rummage box contains sensory items which people can pick up, feel and carry around anytime. A memory box can contain vintage objects sourced from charity shops or ebay, which are great tools for reminiscence, or can be tailored with meaningful items for a specific individual.

5 Support care staff to decorate each resident's door with an A4 sheet with facts about their lives, e.g. job, family, talents, interests, routines, favourite music, and photos.

My favourite things

Music - Elvis

Film - It's a Wonderful Life

Interests - birdwatching, cricket

Family - I married my wife

Elsie on Valentines day



I was a
champion diver
and an aeroplane
mechanic



Balancing risk and choice - “A life without risk is not worth living.”

As the manager, you naturally have to consider the implications of risks in your care home. However, a certain element of **positive risk** is essential for all of us to have a **good quality of life**.

As well as considering aspects of risk, such as falling, **it's just as important to consider the benefits** of a certain activity to your resident and the opportunities it provides. If a person has always gone for a daily walk and wants to continue, the benefits of supporting this activity, for instance by using a volunteer to accompany the person, will probably outweigh the risks (including the risk of lack of exercise...).

Risk assessments should be enabling - a way of managing risk safely, rather than preventing people from doing things. Most everyday activities can be managed safely and, where necessary, appropriate solutions found. Try approaching a new activity or opportunity by thinking **“how can I make this possible?”**

Discuss with staff, relatives and residents what is needed to balance risks and rights – and **why positive risk-taking is so important**.

“...positive risk is essential
for all of us to have
a good quality of life”

Connecting with the outside world

Opportunities for a resident to go out of the care home, if practical, are a wonderful chance for them to see and engage with the outside world.

Even very short outings can make a big difference.

- **Appoint 'community champions'** within the home (e.g. one member of staff and one resident). Allow them time each week, a quiet room, computer and phone so that they can focus on building ties with community groups (like scouts, brownies, singing or amateur dramatic groups). Groups may visit the care home (to sing or talk with residents), or they may invite residents to events outside the care home. **This will create opportunities** for residents to enjoy relationships with people in their community and therefore feel less isolated. Give them support, encouragement and guidance to ensure they feel empowered and confident.
- **Seek opportunities for your residents to interact with younger people.** Some care homes have school groups who visit the home, while others have involved Health and Beauty students who practise their skills with treatments, hand massages and painting nails.



Bringing the community in

- **Are there relatives who might help out in the home**, e.g. taking residents into the garden or leading or supporting a particular activity? An email, or posters at reception and in the community can help get the ball rolling.
- **If your care home belongs to a group, could you link with another home** within the group and enjoy a shared lunch or other activity?

“Our staff have a target of taking at least one resident out at least once a month - to go shopping, sit in a cafe, visit the library, whatever brings them enjoyment. Residents and staff love these opportunities to take time out together.”

Further Resources

Here are some links to more practical information, ideas and resources:

Alive! is a charity dedicated to improving quality of life for older people in care through meaningful activity. We provide a range of person-centred activity sessions and we offer training for care home staff.

www.aliveactivities.org

Alive! also hosts an **online forum** for care staff and activity co-ordinators to share ideas for activities, find resources and feel supported – anyone can join. <http://aliveforum.aliveactivities.org>

Memory apps for dementia – a website with the latest app recommendations for touchscreen tablets, and ideas for how to use them with individuals or groups of older people. www.memoryappsfordementia.org

Living well through activity in care homes: the toolkit – care home staff resources (Royal College of Occupational Therapists) This comprehensive toolkit has a wealth of ideas for engaging with residents and is well worth a look. www.cot.co.uk/living-well-through-activity-care-homes-toolkit-0

Playlist For Life is a charity providing advice and training on how to create a playlist of personally meaningful music on an iPod for people living with dementia. www.playlistforlife.org.uk

My Home Life is a UK-wide initiative that promotes quality of life and delivers positive change in care homes for older people. Their website has a wealth of useful resources. www.myhomelife.org.uk

NIACE (The National Voice for Lifelong learning): Learning for older people in care settings: A guide for care managers. http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/c/a/care_managers-final.pdf

Using ICT in activities for people with dementia (Social Care Institute for Excellence). Short and really useful guide to using the internet, including iPads and phones, with people living with dementia.

<http://www.scie.org.uk/dementia/supporting-people-with-dementia/ictfordementia/files/ictfordementia.pdf>

Care Home Open Day is a UK wide initiative inviting care homes to open their doors to their local communities. www.carehomeopenday.org.uk

▶ **Dementia Care Matters** is a global dementia care culture change organisation. DVDs for staff training can be found on their website <http://www.dementiacarematters.com/dementiacaremattersdvdshop.html>. A link to the 'Offering Toast' clip, demonstrating the impact of positive social interaction in care can be found here. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swjmuD_qZyo

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Alive! would love to hear your feedback about this guide, please contact us on **0117 377 3756** or info@aliveactivities.org