

Maintaining identity in a care home environment

Good practice guide no. 1



My Home Life Cymru

My Home Life aims to promote quality of life for those who are living, dying, visiting or working in care homes for older people through relationship-centred practice.

My Home Life Cymru celebrates and shares existing best practice in care homes and promotes care homes as a positive option for older people. This is one of a series of eight good practice guides that follow the evidence-based My Home Life themes.

There are eight evidence-based themes for My Home Life:

- **Maintaining identity**
- Sharing decision making
- Creating community
- Managing transitions
- Improving health and healthcare
- Supporting good end of life
- Promoting a positive culture
- Keeping workforce fit for purpose

These themes provide a framework that care homes can use to develop their services and help staff focus on quality of life issues rather than being led by the care tasks that are needed to care for the residents.



Good practice guides

This guide will hopefully inspire discussion about how to make sure that we maintain residents' positive identities.

In particular we would like you to ask yourself:

How do you help residents maintain a sense of who they were, and who they still are today?

How do you help residents keep a sense of purpose and continuity in their lives?

As care home staff, your skills and expertise in engaging with and supporting residents can make all the difference. This guide includes some ideas, tips and practice examples to help promote a positive identity among care home residents.



Who am I?



How do you help and support residents to continue being 'them', keeping a sense of continuity in their lives? The inability to continue with simple routines and tasks such as cooking, cleaning or gardening can be demoralising and depressing. This situation can rob a person of their sense of purpose in life, and they may withdraw into themselves. Supporting a resident to maintain their identity is critical to their happiness within the care home.

Getting to know someone can be a challenge. If the person is suffering from the trauma of moving into a care home from their own home in the community or has a dementia and/or communication difficulty, you may need to be patient and work hard to get to know them well and build up a relationship of trust.

The residents within care homes in Wales have a wealth of experience, expertise and knowledge in a wide range of fields and interests. Doctors, lawyers, cleaners, nurses, labourers, scientists, teachers, artists, lecturers, as well as individuals who have been awarded OBE's, MBE's and other accolades live in care homes. As one resident says, *'you don't live for over 90 years without learning a few things'*.

How do you make sure that you are supporting these individuals to maintain their own unique identity? If a person has been a cleaner for most of their working life, do you look for opportunities to involve them in cleaning duties in the home? Many older female residents have a wealth of knowledge of cooking and baking. How many recipes do these individuals have between them? Do you ask them for their input? If a person has experience working in personnel matters, are you using their skills when recruiting new staff to support them?



Albert, a resident at Swn-y-Mor Care Home in Aberavon, enjoyed a relaxing evening with some friends on a regular basis when he lived in his own home in the community. They would visit the respective homes of all on a weekend evening and enjoy a take-away meal and a drink. When Albert moved to Swn-y-Mor, the staff were unaware of his weekly activity.

When Albert had settled in, he felt confident in asking the manager of the home if it was possible for his friends to visit him with a view to starting up their get-togethers again. Sharon and her team were only too happy to help support Albert and his friends in making the arrangements for them to visit and for a take-away meal to be available for them. This regular activity has now been re-established and has meant that Albert and his friends can continue to maintain their good relationship.



Mair, a resident in Mumbles Nursing Home near Swansea has always been keen on knitting. Making items of clothing for herself and her family and friends has been part of her life for over 60 years. However, Mair soon found out that many of the staff within the home did not share her knowledge or skills in this area.

So why not teach them how to knit? Mair began to share her knowledge to several staff members although she was regularly frustrated by their progress. 'Some of them are hopeless, but it's nice to see them try'.

A resident's sense of continuity and purpose can be satisfied by recognising and valuing their life, the knowledge and skills they have developed over their lifetime. What they have achieved and experienced over the years has not been for nothing, they still have a lot to give. Let's make a real effort to support them to maintain their identity.

Top Tips for maintaining residents' identity

- **Person-centred care** is crucial to maintaining positive identity and involves valuing people and those who care for them; treating people as individuals; looking at the world from the perspective of the individual; challenging stereotypes and providing a positive social environment. Make the time to develop trusting relationships with residents and relatives.
- Residents should be able to decide how they dress and which items to bring into the home, and have **control over personal space**. They should feel able to exercise choice and control and be supported to do so through flexible routines and regimes.
- **We all need privacy**, and this must be respected. Intimacy among loved ones must also be respected. Can you provide a quiet space for families to meet?
- **Consistent staff assignment** enables staff and residents to get to know each other. Staff should be able to note the time of day when individuals express themselves best and the activities that stimulate conversation. Don't assume residents will automatically want to share their own views. It takes time to build confidence in a relationship.
- **Life-story and/or reminiscence work** gives staff an insight into what matters to each individual. It can include sharing memories, life stories, oral history or a life review, and can be both therapeutic for the resident and helpful to staff in getting to know residents as individuals. Good communication is essential but may not always be straightforward. It can help to use creative aids such as photographs or personal objects as cues, and to have visitors support interactions. Paying attention to environmental conditions, such as noise, is particularly important for those with sensory impairment.
- Enabling individual residents to **maintain contacts** with friends and the local community, as well as to develop new relationships with others with similar backgrounds or interests, helps to promote positive identity. Supporting residents to visit, write to or telephone others can be helpful.
- **Participating in meaningful activities** can be very positive for maintaining identity. But what counts as meaningful depends on each and every resident's interests and capabilities. In the case of organised activities, having the choice of opting out of them is just as important as the activities themselves.
- Exploring with residents their own **ethnic, cultural and spiritual needs** is part and parcel of person-centred care. Seeking to ensure that recruitment practices promote cultural diversity among staff that reflects the resident population is also important, along with enabling residents to attend places of worship or religious events outside the care home.
- **Staff need to be supported** to appreciate the psychosocial aspects of their caring role, be given space for their own reflection, be recognised and valued for the work they do, and be given help to deal with any difficulties.



How well are you doing? Rating your practice:

Make time to stop and think about what you do as part of your role in the care home. Here are some things to think about.

The person:

Who is this person? What is it that makes them who they are and so unique? What is important to them in their life?

Values:

What does their life story tell us about the values and beliefs they hold?

Strengths:

What are the strengths they have developed throughout their life?

Adapting to life in a care home:

How do they feel about living here? What changes have they made to try and cope with and manage the current situation? How can residents continue to have choice and control over their own lives and routines?

Network:

How can they maintain their contacts and continue to be linked to the communities, clubs, activities and places that they used to attend and the interests they pursued?

Perceptions of the future:

How do they see the future?

Hopes and dreams:

What would they like to achieve?

Working with them?

Can they describe the kind of help they would like?

How does your practice rate?

Sometimes there are no easy answers to these questions. So much depends on individual circumstances. Try asking your colleagues what they think and share what you find.

(Adapted from Wells (2005) Biographical and developmental approaches. In H. Heath and R. Watson (eds.) *Older People: assessment for health and social care*. Glasgow: Age Concern)

Please visit agecymru.org.uk/mhlc to view other resources to help in developing the eight My Home Life best practice themes. Presentations from previous My Home Life Cymru events are also available to download.

In addition to this, the other My Home Life web sites – myhomelifemovement.org and myhomelifedvd.org.uk give detailed information on the work of My Home Life and are full of case studies and examples of good practice in action.

If you would like to support our vital work and make a difference to the lives of older people in Wales please contact the fundraising team at Age Cymru on 029 2043 1555 or donate at www.agecymru.org.uk/donate



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