

Sharing decision making in care homes

Good practice guide no.2



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 fully include all those involved when making decisions that affect residents' lives.

In particular we would like you to ask yourself:

How do you help residents keep a sense of control over their lives?

How can you involve residents, relatives and staff in decisions about how the home is run?

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 the sharing of decision making throughout the care home, involving residents, relatives and staff members.



It's my life



As we get older, our bodies and minds might not work in quite the way they used to. Even making small decisions can be a challenge. On top of this, living with others can restrict our rights to do as we want. Taking this into account, decisions affecting residents must be based on a balance of rights against risks, but encouraging choice is essential to wellbeing. This is further helped by involving residents, relatives and staff in decisions about how a care home is run.

- How do you feel if your choices are limited in various aspects of your life?
- How do you react when you are not in control of your circumstances?
- Do you give residents a voice in their care home?
- Do you look for opportunities to involve them in making decisions that directly involve them?

Residents don't usually have a choice about who they share their care home with, or who supports them in that environment. In that situation, what can you do to make them feel a sense of belonging within the home?

We are aware that residents have all done a very good job at being in control of their own lives in the years leading up to living in a care home. Let's look for ways to involve them in the decisions that affect their lives now.

Ana, the registered manager at Penylan Residential Hotel in Cardiff is keen to involve residents in every aspect of running the home. 'If something affects them directly, shouldn't they have a say in that?' When planning to recruit a new member of staff, Ana decided to ask residents for their involvement. 'Several of our ladies showed an interest in being involved and all of them had ideas of what questions from their perspective, were important to ask prospective members of staff.'

Although there were obstacles to overcome, Ana and the staff persevered to the extent that residents now have a direct input into selecting who supports them.



Although some residents may have communication difficulties, they will be able to indicate what they do or don't like. Do you show patience in finding out their preferences? Not only do you need to listen to them, but you need to take their views on board, moulding the care home and its environment to their wishes and needs.

Eryl, the cook at Mumbles Nursing Home is very clear on what her role is, 'If they want it, I'll get it and prepare it'. A choice of menu is very important in the daily lives of all of us. Also, just because many older people were used to limited choices in their youth, doesn't mean we can't try and introduce them to new tastes. Several homes now have themed menus e.g. Indian night, pasta choices, vegetarian night. Of course, we need to respect that some will always go for the old faithful dishes, but not everyone. Agnes was delighted to find new dishes that widened her mealtime experience 'I'd never had curry before I moved in here'.

Taking risks is part of life. Rather than looking to remove all risks, you need to manage them. How would you feel if someone told you what you couldn't do before you even had a chance to try it first? Let's not dismiss new ideas or choices just because we think it won't work. Give it a go, give these ideas a chance to work. Manage the risk and help the resident to be in control of their lives as much as is possible.



The staff at Severn View Residential Home in Chepstow were having difficulties in supporting a resident due to his challenging responses to them. However, observing his behaviour and body language when calm, they realised that he had a desire to spend time in the garden of the home.

Firstly by accompanying him, then after time moving on to observing him from a distance, the staff began to see changes in his behaviour. Eventually, this resident was given access to the keypad of the unit and was able to access the garden when desired. The home was also able to bring his greenhouse from his house in the community and transfer it to the grounds of the home. This gentleman is now able to use the garden and greenhouse and grow produce for the home.

As Sian the home manager comments, 'sometimes you just need to try things, carefully risk assess and see what happens. We need to understand dementia and support people in their reality.'

Top Tips on how to share decision making and balance risk

- Look for opportunities for negotiation and shared decision-making in every aspect of daily life. Many residents desperately want to be involved in decisions that affect them. Exercising choice is essential to quality of life. Focus on what residents can and want to do, rather than what they're not able to do.
- Recognise that your residents and relatives are best placed to help you deliver good quality of life. Relatives need to have the opportunity to be fully involved in all aspects of care, including assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of care, if this is what the resident wishes.
- Enabling residents to make active choices can involve risk. It is important for staff to recognise that risk-taking is a normal part of life, so long as it is an informed and positive. Risk is a part of life, whatever age you are. Remove all risks and you reduce someone's quality of life.
- It can be difficult, especially for residents with any degree of cognitive impairment, to express their wishes, but these are the ones who are particularly at risk if care routines become inflexible and fail to respond to individual needs and preferences. Finding out more about residents helps you make informed choices about risk, especially if they have difficulty communicating their needs.
- While routine and order can help people predict events and help them feel more control over their lives, they can also act against individuals' choice and control if they are rigid and inflexible. Regimented routines restrict scope for decision-making and remove any sense of freedom. Seek to find a balance around routines in the home.
- Without training, staff can find it difficult to step back from the care that they provide and re-consider how they interact with residents in a manner that respects choice and control.
- Be aware of how certain language, tones of voice or even behaviour can be perceived as demeaning or patronising by residents, which will in turn discourage them from expressing their views and opinions. The developing of relationships with residents can help you to relate to them in a positive way.
- Staff need to have the time, skills and access to information to support residents to make informed choices about their lives. Make time to openly discuss with residents, relatives and other staff, the issues surrounding choices, risk and restraint, and come up with creative solutions.
- To truly shift the balance in allowing residents to have real decision-making power in a care home, staff also need to be able to contribute to decisions that affect them. Involve staff in the decisions that affect them and their role in the home.
- Don't forget that residents can always change their minds. Don't assume residents will automatically want to share their own views. It takes time to build confidence in a relationship.



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:

What decisions in their daily life are important to them? Can you help them maintain control over these parts of their life?

Methods:

What different methods can you use to listen and to engage with residents and relatives? How well do you listen to those residents who may have communication difficulties?

Choices:

To what extent are residents given a choice when it comes to meal times, who supports them with their personal care, trips out of the home etc?

Having their say:

How can you make sure that residents and families have a say in how the care home is run?

Risks:

Do you focus on what a resident can't do rather than on what they can be supported or enabled to do?

What would you do?

- **A resident is at risk of falling and is trying to get out of her chair unaided, do you?**
 - a. Gently return the resident to her seat
 - b. Advise her that she is at risk of falling so should stay in the seat
 - c. Offer her support to get up
 - d. Allow her to take the risk unaided – it is after all her decision.
- **A resident does not speak up, and just goes along with things, do you?**
 - a. Thank your lucky stars that you have an easy resident
 - b. Encourage him/her to join in the bingo or sing-song
 - c. Create the time to build their trust and open up with staff about their feelings about his/her life in the care home.

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.

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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