

# Making relationships count

*A helpful guide for families, unpaid carers and care staff supporting a person moving to live in a care home.*





## Introduction

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This guide focuses on the practical and emotional issues people often encounter when making the decision to support someone to move into a care home.

It aims to raise awareness of the needs of older carers and the value of engaging them as experts in the care of the person they care for. It also provides insights from care home staff.

### This guide will:

- Share some supportive strategies to ensure the best transition possible
- Share real life, giving examples of transitions to care homes from older carers
- Raise awareness of the needs of older carers and families who are caring for someone who is moving to a care home
- Hear from care homes about what works well for them, and how they actively support families and older carers
- Share a reflective practice training resource for care home staff

**Age Cymru and Carers Trust Wales are working in partnership to develop person-centred service models to identify, and better meet the needs of older carers and carers of people living with dementia, funded by the Welsh Government Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant.**

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# Part One: Introduction for Older Carers

**“Older carers have their own specific needs and have tended to be a forgotten group, often going unidentified, either because they do not recognise themselves as carers, or they’re not recognised by services.”**

Kate Cabbage, Head of External Affairs,  
Carers Trust Wales



## Older Carers

Under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act, a carer is defined as “a person who provides, or intends to provide care for an adult or disabled child”.

This definition applies to carers of all ages and there is no minimum number of hours a person has to spend caring to be considered to be a carer under the Act. Therefore, family members and friends who provide care and support to people within care homes can still be considered to be carers and retain their right to information, advice, assistance and support under the Act.

According to the Census, Wales has the highest proportion of older carers in the UK. The numbers of older carers is growing all the time, those aged 85 and over, grew by 128 per cent in the last decade (Carers UK and Age UK, 2015).

\*Source: Carers Trust Wales

- **One in five people aged 50–64 are carers in the UK**
- **65% of older carers (aged 60–94) have long-term health problems or a disability themselves**
- **68.8% of older carers say that being a carer has an adverse effect on their mental health**
- **One third of older carers say they have cancelled treatment or an operation for themselves because of their caring responsibilities**

\*Source: [https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/older\\_life\\_uk\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/older_life_uk_factsheet.pdf)

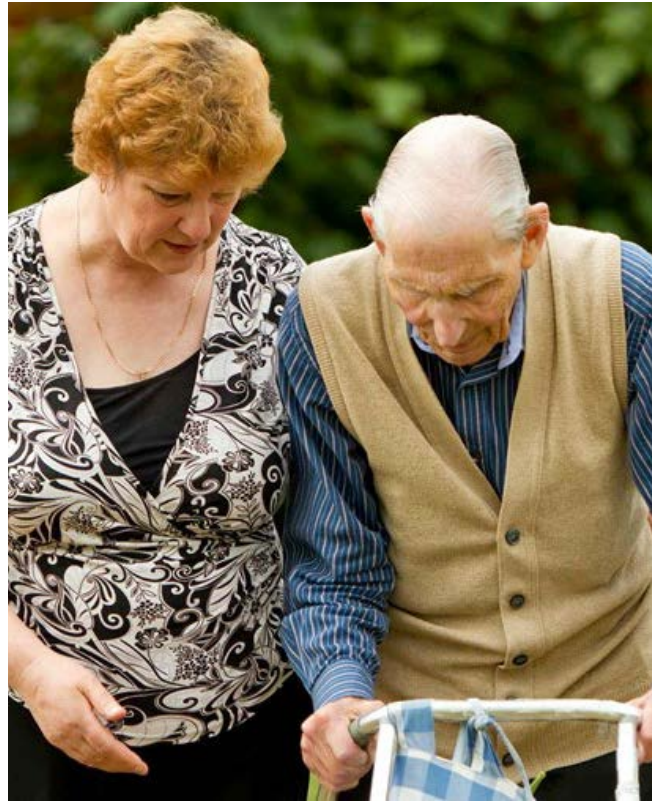
## Supporting someone as they move into a care home

Moving into a care home can be one of the biggest step changes in someone's life. Being the person who has to make the decision about a loved one moving into a care home can bring emotions associated with anxiety, loss, grief, guilt and worry. However, it can also bring a sense of relief and respite.

**“I knew it was the right time. I was exhausted. My friends were telling me I needed a life outside of caring. But nobody can prepare you for the day the person you love moves into a care home.” - Wife of care home resident**

If the move into a care home has meant lack of time for planning, it can be a very stressful, so if you can, reach out to the people in your life who can gently support you. Remember to keep other key relatives informed as plans develop. The care home will want to work with you to make the transition as smooth and comfortable as possible, but they will need your help – after all, you're the expert in your loved one's care. You know what makes them tick, what they like or dislike, who the most important people in their lives might be and what matters to them most.

**“Although it was a great relief for me to hand over the problems of physical care, I hadn't anticipated how strange it would feel to no longer have any real part in his day-to-day life. It did feel strange not to be choosing what he wore and what he ate and drank, but I became an advisor to the care home staff. I had the knowledge that they needed and that made me feel useful.” - Wife**



**Fostering a good relationship with the care home from the start can give you reassurance and help you to feel part of the care home community.**

### **Prior to the move, you might like to consider the following:**

- Meet with the manager, the cook, the activity co-ordinator or other key staff. You can always ask if this can be done remotely, – perhaps they can give you a virtual tour of the building to begin with
- Gain an understanding of the day-to-day running of the home, what activities are on offer, how and when meals are planned and if there are specific visiting times for families and friends
- Find out which Health and Social care professionals link to the home, how often they visit and in addition, how you might connect with them when discussing the care of your loved one if necessary
- Learn the names of keyworkers who will be caring for your loved one and try to get to know them a little. A good working relationship with them could make all the difference to the person and to you
- Help make their new home a home. Personalising the bedroom will help a person to feel safe and settled. Provide them with familiar items of their choice from home that have sentimental value and/or interest. Photographs of family and friends (with labels), a special blanket, knick-knacks, sensory items of comfort, a music player with a personalised playlist – all these recognisable things can help the person to feel more at home in their private space and help staff to acquaint themselves
- If you're considering moving furniture from home into the person's room, you might like to ask for a floor plan of the room, if it is available
- Meet some other relatives/friends/ volunteers if there is a way of doing this. For example, meeting in a public space or via an online relatives' meeting
- Consider if there are things relating to your religion or culture that the care home needs to acknowledge and respect so that you can have an open conversation about this and what it means to your loved one
- Prepare your other relatives and children/grandchildren and encourage them to maintain their relationships and stay in touch
- Ask if the care home accepts pets, or if pets can visit
- A change of address should not mean friends and contacts are absent. Sending some 'Moving Home' cards to contacts who would like to keep in touch with your loved one can encourage them to stay connected
- Prepare a simple life story folder or digital storybook of your loved one's life. It doesn't have to be complete – perhaps the care staff can support you to complete it during visits or phone calls. Pictures can be more helpful than words. Captions that encourage the person to read aloud and tell their story autobiographically can help support their recall and help the staff get to know them and their history
- If possible, make sure that Power of Attorney for both health and finances are in place. This can avoid anxiety and possibly heartache, as the person's needs change
- Discuss your loved one's future wishes, in the form of an Advanced Care Plan.



## *The first few days and weeks*

You will start to find your own rhythm in the first few days and weeks after the move. There may be a system in place to book to see your relative and you can start to make decisions about when to visit which takes your own wellbeing and that of your loved one into consideration. Be prepared for some days to be harder than others. Talk to the care home manager about how you feel. Not everything can be fixed, but a listening ear can usually help.

“When a new family comes to our home I know I have to go at their pace. Everyone is different. I don’t make assumptions. My office door is always open.” – **Care Home Manager**

“We get to know our residents by listening to their families. This helps us to remember that their life stories have informed who they are today. It is so important we get the whole picture of someone.” – **Activity Coordinator**

“We often look for someone within the care home to buddy up with a new resident and their family. This could be another resident or a key member of staff. We have found this really helps someone to settle in.” – **Care Home Manager**

You might want to take some time to reflect on how you’d like to be involved in your loved one’s care after the move.

“I felt a great relief letting go of the full-time caring responsibilities; I could be a husband again.” – **Husband of care home resident**

“I suddenly had spare hours. I wish they (care home staff) had asked me to help more. I could have helped them get to know my husband, including his intimate care needs. I wanted to contribute to the home but I was made to feel I didn’t have a role to play.” – **Wife of care home resident**

For the care home, knowing as much as possible about your loved one will help them to create a new and positive start to living in their new home.

“The care home manager spent time with us as a family, getting to know us and asking questions that built a picture of Mum – not only what mattered most to her in terms of her care, but also as a person. That meant a lot to us.” – **Daughter of care home resident**

## Ongoing communication

It can take time to discover the best form of communication and frequency of contact between you and the care home. Mutual appreciation and gratitude can be very helpful for everyone concerned. It's always nice to hear good news as well as any shared concerns.

### You may like to connect by:

- **A regular meeting with the care home manager or a key member of staff**
- **A frequent telephone call**
- **A virtual platform like FaceTime, Skype or Zoom**
- **Through Social Media – Facebook/ Twitter/Instagram**

## You're an expert in caring

There is no doubt that good communication between residents, relatives and care staff produces the best and happiest relationship-centred care. Your expertise should be valued.

Ask to contribute to the care plan that will be available to all staff working in the care home. The care plan is personal to your loved one; it should cover any physical needs but also personal goals, preferences and hopes for the future. The person's emotional and spiritual needs matter, as well.

A care home can be a positive choice for you and the person you love, especially if they need more support than you're able to give them at home. The transition, although extremely hard, can result in a better quality of life for you both.

“It has been a month since my mother moved into her care home. During this period, I have run through a range of emotions: grief, guilt, fear, suspicion, depression, frustration. I've also experienced relief, gratitude, affection and recently perhaps, reassurance and, possibly, calm.” – **Daughter of care home resident**

“It took time, but after I stopped being M's carer at home and I knew she was safe and settled in the care home, I realised that we had become husband and wife again and that made such a difference to us both.” – **Husband of care home resident**







## ***Caring for yourself***

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**Your needs also matter. You may have exhausted yourself while caring for your loved one, so it's important to give yourself good care as well. Small treats can help you recover and get through the new, different times, for example:**

- Spend time with someone you know well, who can support you
- Get lots of sleep
- Treat yourself to a delicious meal of your favourite food
- Take regular exercise  
[www.agecymru.org.uk/LIFT](http://www.agecymru.org.uk/LIFT)
- Make a reminiscence scrapbook which you can share with your loved one and other family members or friends who knew them well
- Spending fun time with people you love to be with – take a night out or a weekend away
- Join a hobby group
- Join a carers support group
- Give yourself time.

# Covid and Care Homes

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the care home sector. Many homes closed their doors and faced immense pressures to provide safe care for their residents, relatives and staff. We'd like to thank all of the care homes who gave us some of their time to share their expertise, knowledge and stories of great practice.

We've heard from many care homes who are finding creative ways to keep families and friends connected.



“We are making an extra effort to connect with families and ask for their input into the activities we offer. We ask about hobbies and interests, favourite sport teams and music choices. We are learning more about our residents than ever before.” – **Activity worker**

“We have used email to give regular updates and reassurance to families. Communicating regularly has meant our residents' families have understood our challenges and we can respond to their worries.” – **Care Home Manager**

“We've filmed some activities and interactions to send to families on our WhatsApp group, which has been very well received.” – **Care Home manager**

“We've set up a Zoom call for one family to give a consistent approach to how we communicate; it also saves a lot of time for staff who may have to run to answer the phone numerous times a day.” – **Care Home Proprietor**

“We have a family member who writes a letter to her mother every day and drops it off at the care home. It has little bits of news about the family. It really is wonderful!” – **Activity worker**

### A Garden Musical Performance in Barry

“On the 21st of September, a young woman from ‘The Frantic Theatre Company’ came to perform for the residents at College Fields Nursing Home, Barry.

Residents came together, socially distanced in the front garden of the care home. It was the first time since March that the residents had been in a space that we could safely accommodate them in, under the new Covid-19 rules and regulations. It was a beautiful sunny day, so we all needed sun hats and lots of sun cream! There were lots of smiles and chatter. We gave out soft drinks, or alcohol for those who fancied it and ice lollies at the interval!

The atmosphere between residents, staff and the performer was beautiful to watch, because in that moment it was like there was nothing wrong with the world. Everyone was so happy, laughing and singing along.”  
– **Activity Worker**

### Cruising in Pencoed Residential Home, Saundersfoot

“A virtual cruise was planned, with cocktails, dinner with the Captain and a casino. We created social distanced time slots for families to come into the garden to see their loved ones sail away from it all... It was a fab day.” – **Care Home Manager**





### **A Baby Shower in Mold**

“It has been such a difficult six months for everyone here at The Cottage. A few residents and staff have been poorly and we have lost some dear friends. Staff are so tired, emotionally and physically – and our residents have missed their friends and family so much. We had nothing to look forward to and I felt that we needed cheering up.

Our residents commented that the best thing to happen during lockdown had been the news that one of our carers was pregnant and it gave me an idea. Covid restrictions meant that she was unable to have a baby shower, so I decided we would have one at the care home instead!

I kept it a secret, only involving her best friend, her Mum who works alongside her and our manager. We planned that the carer would bring the tea trolley into the lounge in the afternoon so she would spot the baby shower themed cupcakes! I made a short, emotional speech about what the afternoon’s activity was going to be.

We started a baby and children themed quiz I had prepared and after a few questions, our surprise guest appeared – our house manager, dressed in a pink baby outfit and carrying a bottle, a teddy bear and balloons for all the residents. They loved it all!

We stopped for photographs with the (big) baby to send to their families and all enjoyed a glass of Prosecco with our cake. During the quiz, we would stop occasionally to present gifts, which included a baby blanket decorated with rainbows to represent all the rainbows that were given to decorate our windows through lockdown.

All the staff came through to the lounge to join the residents. As I looked around, everyone was smiling, it was so heart-warming to see everyone enjoying themselves after such a tough few months and the residents have talked about it a lot since, saying it was just what they needed and what a special day it had been.” –

**Activity Coordinator**

## Older carers told us about care staff during Covid

“You hear about guardian angels, or at least people being in the right place at the right time. The staff at mum’s care home had put themselves at significant risk to manage a very dangerous situation, professionally. They were in the right place at the right time, putting their lives on the line to save mum and the other residents. I think we can call them angels.” – **Son**

“I miss seeing the staff. I miss hearing about their families, their lives. It’s such a loss to me, not seeing them.” – **Daughter**

“I’ve lost my reason to go out. I used to visit my husband most days; my home was the care home really. I am so lonely now. I have relied on their calls to help me feel part of the day-to-day life in the care home.” – **Wife**

“My Mum’s care home has kept us connected. I am doing what I can, sending pictures, cards, videos. We FaceTime a few times a week but the human touch is the only language that Mum is still confidently fluent in, I have to trust the staff to give that love.” – **Daughter**

“I have been invited to see my husband in the garden if I wear full PPE but I am scared he won’t recognise me. He has dementia and I need to be close to him to be able to communicate. I would want to hold his hand to reassure him. It’s just so hard. The staff try to understand what this is like for me and that helps.” – **Wife**



**In this unprecedented time, relationships have counted. Good communication, staying connected, patience and working together has meant relationships have been sustained and in many cases have been able to flourish.**

# Part Two: For care staff

## Introduction for care staff

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You've told us that supporting families of the residents you care for is a big part of your job. Giving time to understanding families from the start of your relationship with them can also help you understand what matters most to them.

Families can be biological blood relatives, they can be people tied legally by marriage, adoption or civil partnerships, or they may be a family through choice, a personal commitment to each other or part of a community that brings them together.

Understanding the relationships within families can really help you to find the expertise that will help you understand the person you care for.

Families are diverse, complicated, joyful, difficult, accepting, challenging – a real mixed bag!

The reasons for a person's move to a care home will be different for all families, but families have told us of some common feelings associated with the transition.

**"I felt like I was handing Mum over after looking after her at home for so long. It made me feel guilty; as if I had let her down and lost control." – Daughter**

**"I used to worry about who would look after my husband in his new home, but he's surrounded by people to help. Unfortunately for me, I go home to an empty house and it can be lonely." – Wife**



## Time for reflection

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### A care home training resource

#### Introduction:

Putting yourself in the shoes of the relatives and friends of the residents you care for and listening to them with all your senses on 'high alert', can really help you to understand their wellbeing needs and help you to have a more connected relationship.

For example, if the family member you're supporting is an older carer how might it feel for them to let go and hand over the care they've been providing at home?

How might they be coping with the grief and loss associated with old age, illness or dementia?

A listening approach, appreciative questions and sensitive actions will make a world of difference to the person.

# Communication as a way of learning

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**Below is a reflective practice training resource you might like to use in a staff meeting or training session.**

## Trainer introduces the resource:

Any family experiences a period of instability, upheaval and big changes in their lives, if they move home. When a loved one moves into a care home there's likely to be a shared (sometimes unspoken) feeling that this might well be the last home for that person.

## Question for care staff:

Q How might you feel if you were experiencing this with a close family member or friend?

Trainer: Further questions to explore with care staff

- Q When you think of your childhood, what family memories does it prompt? Which family member/s from your childhood comes to mind? What position do you have within your family?
- Q Who do you love? Who do you care for? Who cares for you?
- Q Who do you live with now? Which family members do you get on with? Who is fun to be with? Who do you prefer not to see, or only see at family events?
- Q Who of your friends do you consider to be family? Is there a particular community where you feel you belong? What memorable times – celebrations or sadnesses, have you shared?
- Q How much of your own life story features your family and friends? What words could you use to describe how this might feel?

Trainer: Think of a particular resident in your care home. When you think of them, their family and their relationships, consider these questions...

- Q How can you find out what they might need from their family?
- Q What can you do to help them to feel supported?
- Q What might their family need? How can you be more inclusive to relatives? How can you encourage families to give you ongoing feedback?

Trainer: Use these questions to celebrate what is working well and how to keep the momentum going!

- Q What is going well and how might you make it even better?
- Q How can you keep up the good work?

**Good communication sits at the heart of empathic, thoughtful care. The REAL Communication Framework was established in 2009. The framework helps us to contribute to a person's wellbeing by acknowledging and dignifying their age, health and past life experiences and by understanding and respecting their present psychological needs. Reflective communication strategies and simple, innovative techniques, help support everyone to connect more empathically, meaningfully and enjoyably.**

**You can find out more about interactive communication training workshops here:**

\*<https://realcommunicationworks.com/real-communication-workshops>

## A BIG thank you

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**We would like to thank contributors from more than 20 care homes who have made this guide possible over the last few months of 2020, especially during the most challenging of times. Your expertise, experiences and compassion have enabled us to shine a light on the great practice happening in care homes across Wales.**

**We would also like to thank the older carers who have shared their experience of loving someone who lives in a care home.**

### **Photo acknowledgements:**

**Cover photo kindly donated by Maz Hawes in loving memory of her mother, Anne Newell 11.07.1937 - 22.12.2020.**

### **College Fields Nursing Home**

#### **My Home Life**

<http://myhomelife.org.uk/>

### **Links:**

#### **Age Cymru**

[www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

#### **Carers Trust Wales**

<https://carers.org/>

#### **Social Care Wales**

<https://socialcare.wales/>

### **Links shared by care homes:**

#### **NAPA**

<http://napa-activities.co.uk/>

#### **Carers Trust Wales**

<https://carers.org/>

#### **Social Care Wales**

<https://socialcare.wales/>

#### **Alive Activities**

<https://aliveactivities.org/>

#### **Creating a digital memories book**

<https://www.bookofyou.co.uk/>

#### **Discussing and planning future care and end of life**

<https://mycarematters.org/myfuturecare>

#### **The Happy Newspaper for some happy news!**

<https://thehappynewspaper.com/>

#### **Music therapy with on a virtual platform**

<https://www.livemusicnow.org.uk/welcome>  
<https://mihc.org.uk/>

#### **Creating a family playlist**

<https://www.playlistforlife.org.uk/>

#### **Guided reminiscence and conversation with Many Happy Returns cards**

<https://realcommunicationworks.com/shop>

#### **Postcards of Kindness**

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/discover/2019/october/postcards-of-kindness/>

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