



# COME ON IN

Staying connected 

## Introduction

**This guide aims to help friends and family of people living in care homes make the most of time spent together. Moving into a care home is a big step and along with the changes that living with dementia or other long term conditions can bring, it can be a difficult time.**

A group came together within an Inverclyde care home, Campbell Snowdon House and worked together with residents, their families, friends and visiting professionals to find out what the experience of receiving visitors was like for them.

Some of the family members involved with this guide told us it can take some time to come to a good understanding of what makes a good visit with their relative. We hope that this guide shortens that process for you and helps you make the most of your visit.



## Preparing for your visit

- There are no hard and fast rules about visiting; it should meet the needs of the person you are visiting, as well as your own.



**I thought you had  
to stay for at least  
an hour.**



The time you choose to spend visiting will vary. The person you are visiting may be tired and a shorter visit will be just enough. See how well the person you are visiting copes with your visit; the staff will also be able to guide you and make suggestions.

Some people love a longer visit, especially when there is something to do or see as part of the visit.

Others are happy to spend time just being together, even if the person who is being visited has fallen asleep!

**Some residents have told us that they don't like to be told "I've only got 20 minutes", and others feel that they can't cope with long visits.**

As dementia progresses and conversations become more difficult, you might need to find new ways of being together. Remember there are many ways to communicate; one look can often say more than a thousand words.

People may  
forget what you  
said. People  
may forget  
what you did.  
But most  
people will  
remember how  
you made  
them feel.

Some people can feel unsure about what to say and do during their visit. Communication difficulties associated with dementia can leave you feeling sad and frustrated that your conversation is limited. Your expectations for a visit may need to be different than when you used to visit.

Sometimes, just sitting together and being in someone's company can make the visit enjoyable.

“The whole hour I visit, Dad sometimes dozes and doesn't talk a great deal. I used to worry about it, but now I understand that it's okay to sit quietly and watch the television together. It's okay to just be together for my visit.”

## **Giving your visit a focus can help**

Try different approaches when you visit. What you both enjoyed last time might not work on your next visit. There are many resources that the care home has to offer.

- Help the person tend to their plants and flowers. If you bring in flowers, you may want

to spend a few minutes arranging them together.

- Bring in their favourite cake and join them for an afternoon cuppa.
- Have a look at the activities scheduled within the home. Perhaps there is an activity or a performer scheduled that you can enjoy together.
- Read the newspaper together and look at stories that may lead to discussion.

**“When mum is asleep I will sit with her and read or tidy around her. I know it’s not my job necessarily to tidy, but it still makes me feel like I am helping mum.”**

- Go for a walk in the garden, or out to places of interest, for example the coffee shop, the supermarket or a local event.
- Help write birthday and Christmas cards, notes to neighbours and so on.
- Bring in a magazine or borrow one from the care home and have a chat about some of the stories.
- Watch a favourite TV programme together.

- Reminisce with pictures or create a memory box together.
- If the care home has Wi-Fi, use technology to look at favourite music and film clips. Tablets are great for viewing home movies, photographs, school sports days, or even gaining access to local news stories.
- Bring in a pet.
- Listen to music together. Playlist for Life has some great advice on this at [www.playlistforlife.org.uk](http://www.playlistforlife.org.uk)



**I used to ask my sister what she had for lunch, she often couldn't remember, so instead, I will ask the staff when I visit, or look at the menu and talk about what was on for lunch instead, rather than distress her with trying to remember recent things.**



Visiting can be emotional for everyone; dementia and the changes that happen to the person can be upsetting to experience. The staff are there to support you and the person you are visiting.

Let the staff know what is important to you both for your visit. Would you like the opportunity to enjoy a visit elsewhere, somewhere private, in the garden, summerhouse or the person's bedroom? What about access to tea-making facilities if this is what you used to do when you visited the person before they came into the care home?

**“I’m not able to make my family tea any more. At home, the kettle was on as soon as someone visited. I like it when my visitor is offered tea with me, or we can go to the conservatory and my visitor can make me one. They have fresh milk there, which means my visitor doesn’t have to go looking for someone to get milk, they can stay and blether with me while they make the tea.”**

## Getting off to a good start

I got upset a few times, when mum didn't seem to recognise me. Now I walk into her room and announce myself, "hi mum it's me, Heather", or the staff go in before me and tell mum that her daughter Heather has just arrived.

- Natural introductions can be helpful; they give the person a clue and help to place how they know you. “Hello, it’s Wilma from Paisley” or “Hi Dad, it’s Joan and I’ve brought your friend Jim with me.”
- If the person still doesn’t recognise you; try and steer away from questions, for example “Don’t you know me?” Instead, reassure and reinforce. “It’s Wilma, I’ve come to see how you are, and you’re looking well”. Try and let the person know that you know them and are happy to be with them.

“I visit every week, but Dad forgets and can give me a hard time when I visit, telling me that he doesn’t see me enough or it’s been months since he last saw me. I now don’t take it personally; it would only upset him to correct him. I tend to use humour, or distraction to divert the conversation. I know he says such things because he misses me.”

- Try not to take to heart comments such as “Where have you been, I’ve not seen you in ages”. That person is communicating a feeling.

They have missed you and it's good to see you. It won't help either of you to argue, or correct. Try and change your approach, if every time you visit you get that same response. "Hi, its only me, Sandra, I have got lots to tell you about what's going on in the village, or let me tell you what happened at home/work this week".

## What residents say makes a good visit



**My two neighbours visited at the same time a musician was performing. They were encouraged to join me. We had a great time.**



"My daughter and I will sit and watch the tennis on TV and she is will talk to me about different things that have been happening or

at some visits she will read the newspaper to me”

“Being visited by my grandchildren. I like to see how big they are getting and how they have been getting on at school”

“My daughters come in at the weekend and they bring me everything I need including home baking”

“The girls came in to help me as my son phoned and wanted me to be ready for his arrival. I felt like a parcel. I told my son that I prefer him to help me into my coat and shoes”.



**My friend comes and visits me we have a good gossip about what has been happening in the town I am originally from.**



“I have had my day disrupted when my visitor came in and I had to leave my group card game. I was embarrassed as it didn’t just affect me, but the other players”. I’ve asked my daughter to telephone me first as she visits regularly.

## **Looking after you**

A visit may be forgotten quickly, but the emotions and a sense of well being created by the visit will linger long after you’ve left. This applies to you too.

“My mum has advanced dementia. I visit every week. The manager had a chat with me about what made a good visit for me. I was glad I was asked the question. I was able to use this opportunity to be honest about my feelings as I thought that there would an expectation that I would visit more regularly now that I was retiring. I don’t feel as guilty now and everyone knows that I will continue to visit every week.”



**I would find it difficult sometimes to end the visit, as mum would start to talk about going home.**



At the end of your visit, it would be interesting for the staff to hear from you, about what has made your visit good. Equally, if it hasn't gone so well, it might help to talk to a member of staff who could perhaps help you to explore some of the ways in which you can prepare for your next visit.

Try not to take negative thoughts and feelings away with you. Staff in the care home are there to support you and want to help you feel completely at ease when visiting.

At the end of your visit, have a chat with the staff about how your visit went. It is helpful for the staff to know how they can best support you.

- Is it important to be welcomed by a member of staff? Someone that can give you an update on how your relative's/friend's day has been, to help you prepare for your visit?
- What if the person needs the bathroom when you are there? You may perhaps prefer a member of staff to attend, or you may be comfortable in being able to continue to offer this level of support.
- Would it be helpful for a member of staff to have a chat with you about these sorts of issues, to offer support and advice? Sometimes, talking about how the care home helps support a resident who may not be having the best of days, may give you an idea of how to help you with your visit.
- Speak to the staff about the best time to visit. Mornings may be the best time, where your relative or friend is feeling at their best, or perhaps the mornings are too busy with hairdressing and other appointments.
- If you find ending the visit difficult, staff can help provide comfort and in some instances distraction to help with a stress free departure.
- Sometimes it helps to be able to say goodbye as you would have done normally and reassure that you will be back to visit again.

I leave mum's bedroom door open, so that when I visit mum, the staff will walk past and have a chat with us both about different things. It's nice to have that friendly relationship with staff and mum and I get to hear about what's happening amongst the staff, such as weddings, big birthdays.

I was upset the last time, I came back with my relative and I had to visit the bathroom, they left without me saying goodbye. I like to walk them to the front door, as I would have at home, it's important for me to say goodbye.

Perhaps you want to learn more about dementia. There may be short information sessions, or training that the care home can support you with?

We hope that these suggestions make for a happy successful visit for you and your relative or friend.

## HASTE YE BACK!

Supporters include:





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