

Why doesn't this feel normal?

If you feel more like a guest or formal visitor when visiting your family member in residential care, you're not alone. Many carers and families say they feel this way - especially in the beginning.

You will be grappling with changes to your relationship and carer role while getting used to a new environment and staff. You may also still be wondering whether you've made the right decision about residential care. It can be easy to feel lost and overwhelmed all at once.

Carers offer the following advice:

- ▣ Give yourself time to get used to visiting.
- ▣ Get to know the staff and you'll start to feel more comfortable.
- ▣ If unsure of what is expected of you, ask.
- ▣ Watch and get to know other carers - learn from them.
- ▣ Look for enjoyable things to do with your family member.

When will you start to feel comfortable?

Don't be too hard on yourself if settling in to the facility takes more time than you expected. Some carers estimate that this can take up to 3 months.

Take a moment to look at all of the things you've been dealing with lately. Perhaps you should really be giving yourself a pat on the back for having managed to work through all this. Carers usually start to feel more comfortable in the residential care facility once they know:

- ▣ Their family member is coping.
- ▣ How things work day-to-day.
- ▣ How visiting works for them.
- ▣ The roles they'd like to have in the care of their family member.
- ▣ The roles they'd like to have around the facility.
- ▣ How to balance all this with life outside of residential care.

"I did what I could - I took one day at a time."

Dealing with your mixed emotions

Even after the admission of their family member, carers talk of guilt, uncertainty, sadness, regret, frustration and loneliness. They may also feel relief that the care is now shared. For those who have been living with their family member for a lengthy period, feelings of separation and loss may be immense.

Carers who have been through this say you must trust in the decision you made about residential care. Talk to family and friends about how you feel - and other carers at the facility who may well understand.

Who can help you with settling in?

Family and friends

Family and friends may not have been visiting as frequently as you have, so may not be fully aware of what you or your family member are going through. Starting talking is the first step.



Carers suggest:

- ☑ Be open and upfront about what you feel and what you need.
- ☑ Encourage family and friends to share their feelings too.
- ☑ Ask them to visit with you - or to visit on the days you don't.
- ☑ Let them know how they can help.

The residential care staff

It's not uncommon for carers to feel as though they are bothering the staff when they need to talk. Residential care staff are very busy. However, finding the right person and the right time is the key.

- ☑ Approach a staff member with whom you feel comfortable.
- ☑ Let them know you'd like to speak to them when they have a few minutes. Make an appointment if necessary.
- ☑ Confide in this person about how you are feeling.
- ☑ Ask for their advice - and ask to be introduced to other carers.

Other carers

It can be comforting to remind yourself that every other carer you meet at the facility will have gone through much of what you have. They will often be a great source of information and support.

- ☑ Join the residents and relatives' group or carer support group.
- ☑ Use any opportunity you can to meet other carers.
- ☑ Confide in them. They may understand better than you think.
- ☑ Watch and learn from other carers in residential care.
- ☑ Look for things that you too can get involved in.

"When talking to other carers, they just understand."

Other help at hand

Carer support groups can be of great benefit, although you may need to try one or two before finding the right one. Some groups offer more support than others to carers grappling with residential care.

The [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) (ph: 1800 242 636*) offers information, support and advice to people caring for a family member or friend. They can also tell you about the National Carer Counselling Program that offers telephone or face-to-face support to carers.

Further information:

- ☑ [National Carer Counselling Program](#) - call 1800 242 636*.
- ☑ [Making visiting work for you](#) - information sheet.
- ☑ [How to find your new carer role in residential care](#) - information sheet.
- ☑ [More opportunities for carers in residential care](#) - information sheet.

Contact the [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) on 1800 242 636* to request the above information sheets be sent to you - or to find out about other information sheets in this series.

*Free call except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates.

We do our best to keep these links up to date, but the internet changes all the time. If you can no longer access any of the above resources, please go to our [Internet Troubleshooting Guide](#), or email us at website@carersvic.org.au