

How to help the staff get to know your family member

Why you should start telling stories

When your family member moves into a residential care facility, it is important to help the staff and other residents get to know them.

This might involve their favourite sports, their family, trips they've been on, jobs they've held, challenges they faced, successes they had, pets they loved, grandchildren who've grown - just about anything that holds special meaning or memories for your family member.

This is a lot of information to share but it doesn't have to happen overnight. Look for opportunities to share your stories. Drop them into the conversation. Everyone loves to hear a tale - and you may enjoy reminiscing.

*"Nana was a painter.
We hung her artwork in her room and told stories about each piece.
I think the staff were impressed."*

How a 'life history' could help

A life history is like a book of memories. It is a collection of photos, letters, notes, pictures - anything that helps tell the story of your family member's life. Help your family member put together a book or photo album, which they can then take with them to the residential care facility.

The life history can be a great conversation starter when your family member is getting to know the staff and other residents. You may even like to use it when getting to know other carers.

Make wishes, preferences and expectations known

When your family member moves into residential care it is important to discuss the wishes, preferences and expectations each of you hold.

As a carer you have an important role in making these known to staff. It may be that your family member wishes to change rooms, has certain meal preferences or holds expectations about how the care will be provided.

The residential care staff have a responsibility to listen to these wishes and preferences, while giving feedback to residents and carers on what can realistically be expected and provided.

Talk through any concerns you have with one of the senior staff who may help you find a compromise. Making suggestions about how you could support staff in these requests may also be appreciated.

Talk about cultural or religious practices

If cultural or religious practices are important to your family member, you need to make the staff aware of this.

Sometimes this is easier said than done. What seems different to staff might seem very normal to you - it can be difficult to know what you need to tell them. Here are some things to consider, with examples:

- ▣ Forms of address
Should they use your family member's first name or their title?
- ▣ Style of dress - What is acceptable and what is not?



- ▣ Food requirements and practices
Are certain foods not eaten or do they fast sometimes?
- ▣ Celebrations
Are there important events or days of celebration?
- ▣ Perspectives on gender
Do cultural or religious practices forbid a male resident to be assisted by a female staff member?
- ▣ Death and dying
Who should be present and what is expected of staff? Are there certain things that should happen immediately after death?
- ▣ Funerals
Are there specific requirements or arrangements already in place?

By talking with the staff about cultural or religious practices, you can help them find ways to support your family member in maintaining these connections.

Further information:

- ▣ [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) - ph: 1800 242 636*. Information, support and advice for people caring for a family member or friend. You can also request the above information sheets be sent to you - or 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