



## 9 Ways to Help Promote Dignity in Your Care Home

If people feel their identity and value as a human being is not respected, this can stop them from enjoying life and living comfortably during a period of care.

There are 8 factors related to dignity identified by the Social Care Institute for Excellence:

- Choice and control.
- Communication.
- Eating and nutritional care.
- Pain management.
- Personal hygiene.
- Practical assistance.
- Privacy.
- Social inclusion.

Methods for upholding dignity are usually small, seemingly inconsequential things, but to a person who has resigned the majority of their independence to a stranger, they mean the world. Let's take a look at 9 examples, all of which derive from the dignity factors listed above.

### **1. Let people choose their own clothing.**

There is nothing more stifling to a person's identity than having to wear clothes that are not 'them'. People have a strong sense of what style of clothing suits their personality and personal preferences, so to denying them the ability to choose is harmful to their dignity. However, this doesn't mean you can't assist them. With their approval you can help them dress but let them pick what to wear. This includes the physical act of choosing. Unless they ask you to, don't lay out an outfit for them just for the sake of speed. Give them time to select their own from the wardrobe.

### **2. Involve them in decisions relating to their care.**

You might think it's more straight forward to simply go ahead with decisions about changes to the way people receive care, rather than try explaining it to them. But that is harmful to a person's dignity: it makes them feel disconnected and undervalued. Their lack of control over the situation is dehumanizing; they'll feel like they're just an object over which you have complete authority. People appreciate being included as it gives them the sense that their opinion and preferences are respected. Therefore, be sure to involve them in any and all discussions that affect their care. This includes decisions about their medication (e.g., which type to take and how to take it), day-to-day changes (e.g. new staff or changes to the home's layout), and meal plans (this includes dietary requirements and preferences).



### **3. Address the person properly.**

Another crucial part of a person's identity is their name – they are how we identify one another. Therefore, making assumptions about which title or name a person would like to be addressed by – even if you think your assumption is the polite choice – is disrespectful to their identity, which in turn damages dignity. This is particularly important for the elderly, many of whom have certain expectations about how people should refer to them. So always ask a patient how they'd like to be addressed. Similarly, address them with a polite, amiable voice and don't adopt a patronizing tone. They're adults, not children.

### **4. Make food look and taste nice.**

For people in care – as for many people – mealtimes are the highlight of the day. Nothing is more disheartening than having a lousy lunch. Imagine being presented with an unappetizing plate of food – both in terms of look and taste – every day for weeks, months, maybe even years on end. As mentioned earlier, involve people when creating meal plans – they can offer suggestions, including their favorite dishes. Make sure kitchen staff are skilled at cooking, receive fresh, quality ingredients, and make the effort to ensure food is well-presented.

### **5. Respect personal space and possessions.**

You are caregiver and care resident, not mother and child. Just because you're in charge of their care, it does not mean you can barge into their personal space without asking for permission.

Respecting residents' privacy in a care home is of utmost importance: being in such close quarters with strangers can already feel claustrophobic without your lack of consideration. So unless they are incapable of giving permission or it's an emergency, always knock or ask to come in before entering a person's room. Likewise, don't move or rifle through people's personal belongings without permission. Even when cleaning, remember to respect their positions and space -ask them if it's okay for you to move their items while you clean. The simple act of asking makes people feel respected and more open to giving you permission and instills trust. Be sure to put everything back where it was when you're done.

### **6. Handle hygiene activities sensitively.**

You may be used to seeing people's unclothed bodies every day, but the patient will not be used to revealing theirs so frequently. If you need to assist a person with bathing and dressing/undressing, you must handle the situation with tact. Understand that they will be self-conscious and very self-aware when undressed. Above all, you must ask for consent before you engage in any activities involving their body. Explain what you're doing as you're doing it and engage in conversation to make the situation less uncomfortable – having a chat will reduce



how hyperaware they are about their body. If they don't want to talk, ask if they'd like you to put on some music or the TV for background noise.

### **7. Promote social activities.**

Being in a care home can leave a person feeling shut off from the outside world. Particularly for those who have an extroverted personality, this can be extremely stifling and damaging to their identity and dignity. They may end up feeling like they are simply a task for caregivers to complete, like a burden. Having a social life instills them with a sense of purpose and satisfaction, thus improving their quality of life. So you should take it upon yourself to create opportunities for people in your care to engage in social activities, whether it be inside or outside the premises.

Contact with family, eating out with friends, or getting involved in local groups are all good examples. Also, encourage them to adopt hobbies and provide them with the means and equipment to do so, such as knitting or art supplies.

### **8. Know how to detect pain.**

Treating pain in care homes can be tricky. Older people are more likely to experience pain but less likely to complain or want medication. This combination can leave the elderly in a great deal of pain which will distract them and hinder their ability to enjoy the remainder of their life. Ideally you will be educated on how to identify signs of pain without being told. Restlessness, social isolation, and avoidance are just a few examples. Detecting pain is easier if the person is seen by the same caregiver regularly, since trends and changes in behavior will be more apparent. It also enables you to build a relationship with the person, so they'll feel more willing to telling you about any pain.

### **9. Have a friendly chat.**

Your life as a caregiver probably feels very hectic, especially if you have to run back and forth between several people a day. But for a person in care, it could be quite boring or uneventful. You likely talk to dozens of people throughout the day – including other caregivers and service users – but depending on their circumstances, many residents in the care home might only talk to one person a day: you.

A five- or ten-minute chat will fulfill their craving for social interaction and lift their spirits. Let them lead the conversation if they want to, but don't just nod along until you have an opportunity to leave. Really listen and interact with them; show interest in what they have to share. When you have to move on, let them know politely and reassure them that you'll continue the chat next time. And be sure to do so.



## Encouraging Independence in Seniors - Maintaining Quality of Life

As a caregiver, it is important to encourage independence in seniors and to provide the opportunity for them to maintain a better quality of life for themselves. By participating in activities with your senior loved one, you show that you care, and you help improve their overall health. In fact, research indicates that keeping seniors physically, mentally, socially and emotionally engaged can help them retain better cognitive function, stay healthier and live independently longer.

As the seniors in our lives grow older, daily interaction is vital to their health and happiness. However, when caring for them, it is easy to get into the habit of doing things "for" them rather than "with" them. Let's face it -- it can be more efficient to do everything yourself. Seniors are seasoned pros at doing things for themselves, but due to aging bodies or underlying health issues, aspects of everyday living sometimes become a bit more physically and mentally challenging. Seniors may need your help but doing everything for them is not a good solution, nor does it cultivate a better quality of life. Instead, we recommend a technique called interactive caregiving.

Interactive caregiving is a method of caring for seniors that promotes physical, mental, social and emotional well-being. When put into action, this philosophy focuses on the person as a whole, helps seniors live the highest possible quality of life by keeping them happy and engaged, and fosters healthy independent living within their own homes.

The true art of caregiving for the elderly extends beyond task-oriented responsibilities and includes engaging in activities that help maintain a healthy spirit and body. Talk to the senior in your life to help determine what his interests are, then form a plan to do those things together.

When planning your activities, keep the elements of interactive caregiving in mind.

Physical activity, which should always be approved by the senior's physician, helps reduce the severity of illness, increases strength, and reduces the risk of falling. Dancing can reduce high blood pressure, strengthen bones, and lower the risk of heart disease. Dancing with friends also provides a social outlet that stimulates the mind and can reduce the effects of dementia.

Activities such as gardening and housekeeping inspire positive self-esteem and improve quality of life.

Socializing with family and friends, as well as attending parties or other events, makes seniors feel less isolated and promotes good memory retention. The effects of being socially active are just as beneficial as physical activity in terms of self-esteem and higher quality of life, which is important to note for seniors who are unable to exercise.

Mental stimulation, such as crossword puzzles or other brain games, keeps minds active and



facilitates healthy mental and emotional function. Mental well-being fosters a sharp mind and a positive outlook on life.

Emotional well-being depends on several factors, such as feeling connected to family and friends, being involved in the community, or taking on a hobby. Emotional stability helps seniors feel happy and optimistic, which can keep depression at bay.

Encourage seniors to help with tasks they are able to perform, such as folding laundry and writing a grocery list. Play a game or work on a puzzle, read the paper over a morning cup of coffee or take a walk together after lunch. Shopping together provides another form of exercise and the chance to do something together. Planting flowers and other gardening activities are not only fun, but they also provide a sense of accomplishment when you both step back to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

There are many more activities that can improve the quality of life for seniors. Use your imaginations and work together to plan fun things that will transform even the most mundane daily activities into special memories that last a lifetime.