



 age Cymru

YMDDIRIEDOLAETH
GOFALWYR
CYMRU

CARERS
TRUST
WALES

Working with older carers

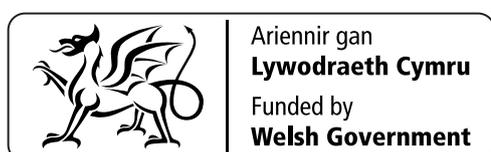
A good practice resource
for care home staff

Contents

Introduction	4
Supporting older carers during care home transitions.....	5
Learning about each other.....	7
Involving older carers in care home life	9
Listening to older carers.....	10
Discussing advance care planning and end of life care	11
Further information and resources.....	12

Acknowledgements

This project is jointly managed by Age Cymru and Carers Trust Wales and is funded by a Welsh Government Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant. The project aims to support the early identification of older carers and to help ensure that they receive timely and person-centred information and advice. This includes older carers generally, as well as the carers of people living with dementia and carers of people who have moved to live in a care home.



According to the 2021 Census, there are 310,000 unpaid carers in Wales. Of these, the majority will be older carers.



An older carer can be anyone with unpaid caring responsibilities who is over 50 years old. There is no upper age limit to being an older carer and the category can include several generations, each with their own life experiences. The oldest carer to complete Age Cymru's 2024 'What matters to you?' annual survey was over 90.

Older carers vary in the type of care they provide. Many care for a partner, sibling or parent, while some are 'sandwich carers', providing support for an older and younger person at the same time (such as a parent and child or grandchild). Others may be 'co-carers', where two people both with care needs support each other. Due to their age, older carers often face different challenges to those faced by younger carers.



32% of respondents to Age Cymru's 2024 'What matters to you?' annual survey of older people reported that they provided unpaid care to at least one person. More than half of these older carers were aged over 65.

This resource

The number of older carers in Wales is growing. An ageing population and increasing difficulties accessing social and health care mean that more older people are taking on unpaid caring responsibilities at home, with many feeling they have no choice but to provide care.



Older carers face many challenges in their role. These may include:

- Poor mental health from stress, loneliness and anxieties around care costs
- Difficulties with their own physical health and/or disabilities
- Problems accessing services, including health and social care, public transport and financial services

There often comes a time when an older carer is no longer able to provide the necessary level of care for their loved one. It's at this point that the person may be moved to a care home.

However, this move doesn't mean the end of the older carer's involvement in care. In most cases, the older carer will have a close personal bond with the person they have looked after. Maintaining this link is vital to the wellbeing of both people.

Older carers are also usually the most knowledgeable and experienced person when it comes to caring for that individual, and their input can be integral to a well-managed transition into a care home.

Care homes therefore have a role to play in supporting older carers and working with them to provide the best possible care for their loved ones.

This resource offers some suggestions of good practice for how care home staff can work with older unpaid carers to include them in the provision of care. It also considers how staff can support older carers themselves as they face

the challenge of moving someone into a care home.

This resource covers a range of different ways that care home staff can work with older carers, including:

- Support during the transition into a care home
- Learning from an older carer about the person in care
- Involving older carers in daily care home life
- Creating space for open discussion and listening to concerns
- Managing conversations around advance care planning and end-of-life care

The information in this resource comes from a range of sources, including conversations with older carers, care home staff, managers and regulators. It also draws on wider research by organisations including Age Cymru, Carers Trust Wales, Carers Wales and Social Care Wales.

All quotations are taken from Age Cymru's 2024 'What matters to you?' annual survey.



Supporting older carers during care home transitions



Making the decision to move a cared-for person into a care home can be a difficult experience for many older carers. Some may feel a sense of grief at the loss of that person from their day-to-day lives. Others may feel guilt or shame because they're no longer involved in caring for that person, and it's common for carers to experience feelings of sadness and even depression after their full-time caring responsibilities come to an end.

.....

“My husband went into a nursing home 5 months ago, after having me caring for him for the last 14 years. The sudden change in my caring role was very difficult to deal with, as was the feeling of being a failure due to not being able to continue caring for my husband.”

The circumstances necessitating a move to residential care vary. The decision to move someone to a care home can happen quickly, or it may be part of longer-term planning. The strain of adapting to manage more serious care needs can be emotionally and physically exhausting for an older carer.

“Carers typically have very high demands on their time. Many are combining their caring role with work, education, and/or the other responsibilities that we all have in day-to-day life.” (source: Carer Aware: Carers Trust Wales and Carers Wales, 2024)

The transition period can also require a great deal of administrative work. An older carer may need to liaise with care homes, the hospital, the local authority and many other parties. They may be looking to get back into work following a period of full-time caring, exploring their options for retirement, or looking for ways to reconnect with people and communities they have lost touch with whilst providing high levels of care.

“My husband had a stroke, so I have had to give up a job I loved and now have less income and feel quite isolated after being used to working full time.”

The transitional period can be a positive experience for older carers. Many will feel relief at no longer having caring responsibilities, or having a reduced caring role, and knowing that their loved one is now in safe hands. They may still want to remain involved in the caring process and may appreciate the chance to work with the care home to manage the transition.



There are many ways that care home staff can help older carers during the transitional process, both emotionally and practically:

- A key cause of anxiety when moving to a care home is its unfamiliarity. Staff can help here by familiarising both the older carer and the cared-for person with the home before the move. This can be done by:
 - Offering to give them a tour of the home and its facilities
 - Introducing them to other staff members, including those not directly involved in care (e.g., kitchen staff)
 - Showing them their room, and start planning out where they can place furniture and decorations
 - Discussing the possibility of bringing a pet to the home
- Paperwork can be challenging, so it's a good idea to have a conversation with the older carer about what they need to have in place before the move. This might include Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA), an advance care plan, and, if they don't have one already, a will.

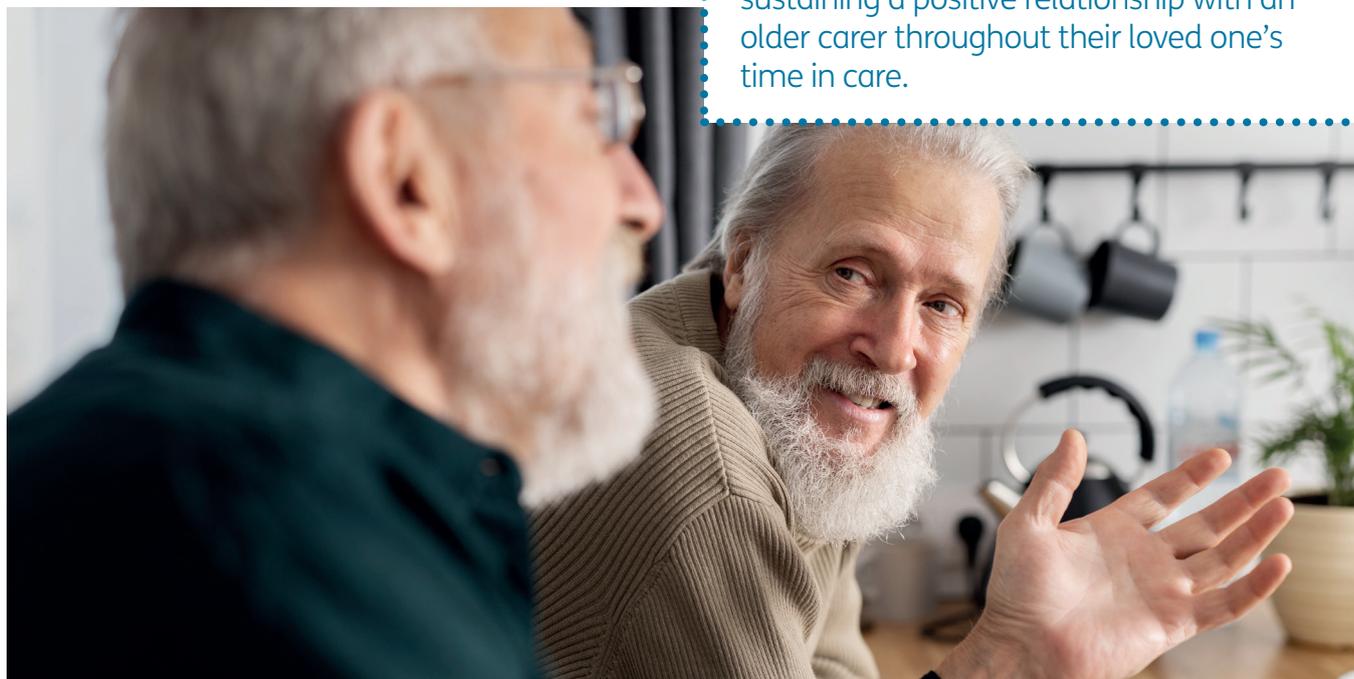
Advanced care planning

Marie Curie provides useful guidance on advance care planning – check out the link at the end of this guide (page 12)

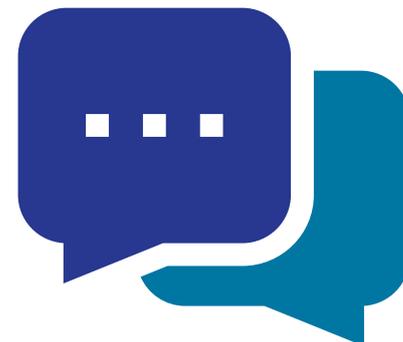
If someone is finding the transitional process an emotional challenge, consider offering them a chance to talk about their concerns. Just sitting down and actively listening to them can have a positive effect on their mental health. It may also help to signpost them to more formal mental health support, such as services from Mind mental health charity (see page 12).

More than anything else, it's important to remember the human and emotional elements of this process. While this resource can give some guidance on how carers may feel about moving a cared-for person into a care home, it's likely that most will have mixed, uncertain feelings.

It's important to understand this complexity, and to recognise that people's feelings may change over time. Being responsive to these changes and maintaining an open mind is crucial to sustaining a positive relationship with an older carer throughout their loved one's time in care.



Learning about each other



When someone new arrives at a care home, it's important that the staff get a clear, rounded picture of them as a person. This means going beyond just their clinical needs to consider their emotional, intellectual and social needs too. It means understanding the different elements that make us all individuals.

.....

An older carer is often the expert on the person they've cared for. They may have been at that person's side for years – often decades – and may have got to know them better than anyone else in that time. It's also likely that they've experienced first-hand the onset of the physical and cognitive challenges that led to that person moving to a care home.

Including older carers in the 'getting to know you' process of the transition into a care is vital to building up this rounded picture of the cared-for person.

The cared-for person should be included in discussions too, unless it is documented that they don't have the capacity to make these decisions themselves. It's important to remember that capacity fluctuates and can be regained.

Some ideas for questions you could discuss with an older carer include:

- What does a good day look like to the person they've cared for?
- Are there any activities, subject matters, foods or other things that should be avoided when caring for them?
- What language do they prefer to speak? How can this be integrated into their daily life at the care home?

.....

Under the Welsh Government's 'Active Offer' policy, care providers should offer Welsh-language services to a person arriving at a care home. This offer should be made without the person needing to ask first.

.....

- Are they part of any social groups that they'd like to keep in touch with?
- Do they have any interests? Any hobbies?
- What did they do for work? Was their job an important part of their life?
- Do they have any religious beliefs? And do they regularly practise their religion?
- Have they previously served in the Armed Forces? Veterans often maintain tight communities and may continue to support one another after the move to a care home. More information on veterans' charities and support groups can be found on page 12.



Open questions can be an effective way of encouraging people to discuss the things that are important to them.

By asking questions like **‘What matters to you?’** or **‘What does a good day look like to you?’**, you’re more likely to receive a detailed, more meaningful answer than if you ask a ‘closed’ question like ‘Do you enjoy football?’ or ‘Would your husband like to take part in art activities?’

Asking open questions gives the person more opportunity to think for themselves and to come up with an answer that more accurately reflects how they feel. This is a vital part of creating a more person-centred care model.

These questions are just some ideas for starting a conversation with an older carer about the person they cared for. Having these conversations shows respect for the personhood of the individual moving into the home, as well as for the knowledge and experience of the older carer.

More practically, it can also help staff to care more effectively for that person, as they have a better understanding of their personality, background and behaviours.

For more ideas on building up a detailed picture of a person moving into a care home, see Age Cymru’s guide ‘Preserving what matters: integrating mental health into care home transitions’ (2024). A link to this guide can be found on page 12.

Taking medication

If the person moving into the care home is currently taking medication, it’s worth checking with their carer to see if there’s a particular way they like to administer it.

Often, an older carer will be the best-placed person to ask about this. While a person’s medical records will show what medication is needed, it’s probably the carer who will know how to administer it in a comfortable and effective manner.

For example, a person who takes several tablets every day may have a routine for when and how to take them. They might like them with a certain drink, or before/after a certain meal. They may also struggle to take their tablets and require help each time they do so.

This is not just a matter of courtesy – a person may experience serious distress if they are not able to take their medication at the expected time and in the expected manner.



Involving older carers in care home life



The task of caring for someone can be a deeply personal matter for an older carer, especially if they've been caring for a partner, close friend or relative. This can make it hard for an older carer to adjust to a new caring role after the person moves to a care home.

Similarly, the cared-for person will often have a close personal relationship with their carer. The withdrawal of that carer may upset them, contributing to poorer mental health in the long term.

An older carer's role doesn't need to stop at the care home door. Staff should take the opportunity of the transition into a care home to speak to older carers about whether they'd like to remain involved in caring. Where appropriate, staff should also discuss this with the person moving into care.

Care home staff are professionals and it's their responsibility to meet clinical care needs within the home. However, there are plenty of ways that an older carer can remain involved in the day-to-day life of their loved one in the home:

- Help with non-clinical aspects of care, such as helping to wash the person's hair, or guiding them on a walk around the garden.
- Join that person in daily leisure activities, such as reading together, watching TV or even cooking together, if possible. Don't be afraid to let people get creative with the activities they'd like to organise.
- Encourage the older carer to take the person out on trips, where it's safe to do so. This could just be a walk round the park but could also be something more organised, like a trip to a football match.

In each case, adopting a 'positive risk-taking' attitude will give the older carer more freedom to remain involved in their cared-for person's life.

It's also worth reporting back to the older carer about the positive effects that their input is having. Does the cared-for person seem happier after spending time with them? Does their mental health seem improved as a result?

Keeping the older carer informed about these things can be a great emotional boost and helps to build trust between the carer and the care home.

It's important to remember that not all older carers want to remain involved in a person's care after they move into a care home.

Some will have found their caring responsibilities exhausting and will be looking forward to a rest. A carer may also have their own care needs, which they can only begin to address now that they have more free time.

It's worth speaking to an older carer about whether they'd like to be involved in care going forward. Many people will be happy to remain involved, but others will be looking forward to this as a chance to take a much-needed step back from caring responsibilities.

Listening to older carers



Older carers may worry that care home staff won't listen to their concerns once they've passed over much of their caring role. This can cause serious anxieties for both the older carer and the person they have been caring for. Maintaining open contact between the older carer and the care home is vital to providing a positive, supportive care experience and to building mutual trust.

There are various ways that care homes can encourage older carers to share their thoughts and concerns about caring for their loved one.

Ideas for keeping in touch include:

- **Keeping the door open:** encourage older carers to ring up or come round for a chat. Remember, there's no issue that's too small to talk through.
- **Good news phone calls:** has the cared-for person had a particularly good day? Let the older carer know – hearing good news can help alleviate concerns and build a sense of trust between the carer and home.
- **Checking in:** if you have capacity, it's worth checking in on an older carer every now and then. Even just providing a listening ear for half an hour can be a huge help.
- **Resident and relative groups:** these involve setting time aside to bring together older carers and the people they had previously cared for to reflect on the care provided in the home and to raise any concerns with staff.
- **Coffee mornings:** does your care home organise regular social events in which older carers can get involved? Hosting a monthly coffee morning could be a great way to help overcome the loneliness that many older carers experience, as well as providing a more informal chance to raise any concerns.

It's worth raising the issue of communication when you first meet an older carer to plan the transition of their loved one into the care home. It can be useful to establish early on how much

contact they'd like to have and what methods of communication would suit them.

Many older carers find that they need to make considerable adjustments to their lives after the person they have been caring for has moved to a care home. For example, they may be looking to get back into work, to apply for new benefits, or to request social care for themselves.

Run by local authorities, charities and other organisations, **community connector** services help to place people in contact with community groups and local services to meet their needs, including befriending, home adaptation and mental health support.

Community connector services vary by area, so it's worth searching online to see what services operate in your community.

Older carers can also contact Age Cymru's advice line with questions about applying for social care, managing benefits, applying for financial support and much more.

Phone: **0300 303 44 98**
(Monday-Friday 9am-4pm)

Email: **advice@agecymru.org.uk**

Many local carer organisations offer support to carers who's cared-for person has moved to a care home. You can find your local Carers Trust Network Partners here: **www.carers.org/help-for-carers/carer-services-near-you**

Discussing advance care planning and end of life care



Having plans in place for the death of a loved one can reduce the stress on unpaid carers, both before and after the end of that person's life. It's important to encourage both older carers and the people they have cared for to discuss end-of-life planning during the transition into the care home.

Many people have some idea of what they want to happen if their health deteriorates, they become seriously unwell or if they are approaching the end of their lives. Many people also have some idea of what they want to happen after their death.

It's important to acknowledge and consider these wishes while they're still alive. Doing so not only shows them respect as individuals but can also make the process of preparing for their death much less difficult for their loved ones.

This could include discussing:

- Plans for their loved one's care during their final days
- Practicalities such as how to organise a funeral, plan inheritance or register a death
- Concerns around breaking the news of a death to friends and family
- Fears and reflections on their own mortality

Only **33%** of people are comfortable discussing their own death with a loved one.

12% would not discuss it at all.

When asked why, **1 in 4** said they didn't want to make their loved ones think about them dying.

(source: Co-op Funeral Care, 2024)

While some people are comfortable talking about their own death or that of a loved one, many find it uncomfortable or even distressing.

The care home can play a role in facilitating these discussions, providing a safe, comfortable and open-minded environment for an older carer to voice their hopes and concerns about what will happen if the person they care for deteriorates or if they need end of life care.

There's no one way to organise these conversations.

Some care homes may host regular 'Death Cafe' sessions, where older carers and the wider family and friends of people in the care home can meet and discuss their concerns around death and dying in a relaxed, judgement-free space.

Others may prefer smaller one-to-one meetings, to give older carers a more private opportunity to share their feelings around end of life.

However your care home chooses to organise discussions around death and dying, it's important that they take place. The end of a loved one's life is often a source of great anxiety for older carers, so it's important that the care home supports them in planning for that day.

Further advice and links to support with having conversations about death and bereavement can be found on the Compassionate Cymru website at www.compassionate.cymru.

Further information and resources

Working with carers

Carers Trust Wales, 'Care Home Options' (2020), <https://carers.org/downloads/wales-pdfs/4-care-homes.pdf>

Age Cymru, Carers Trust Wales, 'A One-Stop-Shop Guide for Older Carers in Wales' (2022), <https://www.agecymru.wales/our-work/carers/carers-reports-and-resources/>

Age Cymru, Making relationships count (2023), <https://www.agecymru.wales/our-work/carers/making-relationships-count/>

Age Cymru, Preserving What Matters (2024), <https://www.agecymru.wales/our-work/care-homes/good-mental-health-in-care-homes/>

Age Cymru, 'Supporting the wellbeing of older care home residents - a toolkit' (2025).

Age Cymru, Carers Trust Wales, 'Your rights as a carer' (2020), <https://www.agecymru.wales/our-work/carers/carers-reports-and-resources/>

Carer Aware: Carers Trust Wales and Carers Wales, 'Co-producing with unpaid carers in health settings' (2024), <https://carers.org/carer-aware-project/co-producing-with-carers-in-health-settings>

Care UK, Preparing for a move to a care home: advice, suggestions and practical support (2024), <https://carers.org/downloads/general-pdfs/careukrcsmovingchecklist.pdf>

Carers Wales, Wales Carers Assembly: 2024 report (April 2024)

Carers Wales, 'Life after caring' resources, <https://www.carersuk.org/wales/help-and-advice/practical-support/life-after-caring/>

Marie Curie, 'Planning your care in advance' resources (2024), <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/terminal-illness/planning-ahead/advance-care-planning>

Mind, 'Guides to support and services' (2024), <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/>

My Home Life England, City St George's, University of London, Thriving in Residential Care: The Voices of Older People, Families and Care Teams (2024)

Royal British Legion, Veterans' Gateway, <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-support/who-we-help>

Woody's Lodge, <https://www.woodyslodge.org/>

Data and reports

Co-op Funeralcare, Planning for Death: National attitudes towards death, dying, bereavement and later life planning (2024)

DataMapWales, 'Care Inspectorate Wales – Adult Care Homes' (2024), https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/geonode:ciw_adult_care_homes_wales

Older People's Commissioner for Wales, Understanding Wales' Ageing Population: Key Statistics (2023)

Contact Carers Trust Wales

Carers Trust Wales
Transport House
1 Cathedral Rd
Cardiff CF11 9HA

Phone: 030 0772 9702
Email: wales@carers.org
carers.org

Contact us

Age Cymru
Mariners House
Trident Court
East Moors Road
Cardiff CF24 5TD

Phone: 029 2043 1555
Email: enquiries@agecymru.org.uk
www.agecymru.wales