

Why visiting is important - for you and your family member

For most carers and families, visiting a family member in residential care is uncomfortable initially. Perhaps for this reason it is not uncommon for families to pull away, leaving the main carer with most of the responsibility for visiting. Carers really do need support in this.

Remember that visiting is the way you maintain your relationship. It's also the way you assure yourself that your family member is okay and well cared for.

Through your visits your family member will be kept in touch with life outside of the facility. Your visit may in fact be the highlight of their day, offering a break from the daily routine.

Why and how to plan your visits

Planning each visit is particularly helpful while you are still finding your 'place' in the residential care facility. This will ensure you have quality time with your family member and make the most of each visit.

When planning a visit you might consider:

- ▣ The time you have available.
- ▣ The time of day that is best suited to your family member.
- ▣ The type of interaction that is easiest for your family member (e.g. communication problems or memory difficulties might make walking together more enjoyable than talking).
- ▣ The practical things you would like to continue helping with.
- ▣ The activities or interests you could enjoy together.
- ▣ Who your family member might like to see - arranging the visit for when you are present may make this easier for both of them.
- ▣ The roles that carers can get involved in at the facility.

*"I felt like a formal visitor at the start.
Then mum and I started doing things together - like old times.
Now we both look forward to my visits."*

You will find more ideas and suggestions in the information sheets 'How to feel comfortable at the facility' and 'How to find your new carer role in residential care'.

Carers' tips on visiting

- ▣ Say hello to the staff to let them know you've arrived.
- ▣ Sometimes just 'being there' with your family member is enough.
- ▣ 'Chip in' in with the day-to-day care of your family member, if you'd like to.
- ▣ Visit during the activities program and join in.
- ▣ Bring some photos, a game, a letter - something to do together.
- ▣ Bring the newspaper or a book - read together.
- ▣ Use other rooms and the garden - vary where you spend time.
- ▣ Get out and about together if possible - walk around the block.
- ▣ Bring other visitors with you sometimes - grandchildren too.
- ▣ Get to know other residents and carers.



Carers and families say that one of the most difficult things about visiting is when you have to leave, particularly if your family member does not understand why. Their advice is this - when it's time to go, it's time to go. Let your family member know when they can next expect you. And if you need support or a 'diversion' in order to get out the door, ask the staff to help with this.

Options for when visiting is not possible

The mere thought of not visiting your family member daily may cause you great anxiety, guilt and distress. You are not alone in this.

Sometimes though, health, travel distance, family crises or past relationship problems can prevent carers and families from visiting. In some situations, visiting is just far too painful.

Commonly carers find that in order to look after their own health and wellbeing, they need to take time off from visiting every so often. Some visit every second day, others visit once a week. Only you can decide what is best for you and your family member. Looking after yourself is a good way of ensuring that you can continue caring.

*"After visiting Harry every day for a year, I was exhausted.
It broke my heart but I had to stop.
Now I visit three times a week and we make the most of it."*

Here are some suggestions from carers:

- ▣ If possible, talk to your family member about visiting - try to reach an understanding of what suits you both.
- ▣ On the days you don't visit phone the facility for an update and speak to your family member too.
- ▣ Let the staff know when you won't be in so they're aware your family member might need more assistance than usual.
- ▣ Ask family or friends to visit on the days you don't.

Phone the **Carer Line** on **1800 242 636*** for more information and support with visiting.

Further information:

- ▣ [How to feel comfortable at the facility](#) - 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 **Carer Line** 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