



Living in a Care Home

Clothing and laundry

Clothes count

Few people really don't care about what they wear. For residents of care homes, already losing their independence in many ways, the significance of areas of their life where they exercise some control increases. It is important that residents, as far as possible, exercise choice over the clothes that they wear and that their clothes are treated, along with all of their possessions, with respect and care.

If your relative is unable to express their own opinions on clothing than you can do it for them. If your father always wore a shirt and tie, or your mother never wore trousers, make sure the staff know this information and act on it. Clothing that is easy to remove is a sensible response if a resident has problems getting to the toilet in time but should not be the stock response if it causes distress to the resident.

Clothes as old friends

To some people being clean and tidy comes second to being comfortable. Homes should take their lead from the resident and what other people – relatives in particular – say about them. If a resident liked to potter in a pair of overalls or spend most of the day in an apron they may treat coming into the care home as an opportunity to cast off old habits, or they may not. The comfortable feel of familiar clothes may take on more significance as the resident starts a new life in unfamiliar surroundings or negotiates the difficulties of confusion and memory loss.

Many visitors to care homes judge the well being of residents by their appearance and how clean and tidy their clothes look is a big element of appearance. Soiled, scruffy clothing can be as distressing to the resident wearing it as to the visitor seeing it. A dilemma facing staff is helping residents to keep clean while maintaining their dignity. While it is important to help residents keep their clothes clean while they are eating, thought should be given before measures to keep clothes clean are routinely applied to all residents. 'Bibs' come in a variety of colours and styles and that can

help to reduce stigma, however some residents would rather have soup stains on their shirt than be given a bib to wear.

Checking, replacing or mending clothing is a job that often falls to relatives and how a home looks after its residents' clothing is one of the main concerns of relatives who regularly visit care homes. It is a very visible way of measuring standards of care and the respect shown to residents and their belongings. But relatives wonder how to complain about missing clothing or problems with the laundry and whether to take matters further if their concerns are not addressed satisfactorily.

Some simple rules

- Talk to the staff about your relatives likes and dislikes around clothing.
- Residents should be helped to choose their own clothes each day.
- Residents should be supported to make decisions about new clothes. Consider taking the resident out to the shops or use catalogues or the internet to involve them in choosing new clothes.
- Whatever system the home has in place to wash an individual's clothing it should minimise the risk of losing or damaging clothes during laundry
- A resident being given another resident's clothes to wear is not acceptable