

Compliments, criticisms and dealing with conflict

Is your issue related to rights? Or is it an expectation?

Sometimes carers and staff face conflict. Often this has to do with expectations about the care provided and the rights of the resident.

When raising a concern, you should be clear about whether the issue is related to the rights of your family member or whether it is based on an expectation. If you are in doubt about this:

- ▣ Read the Resident Agreement and the [Charter of Residents' Rights and Responsibilities](#).
- ▣ Ask other carers whether your concern seems fair.
- ▣ Talk to one of the senior staff - look for a solution.

If your concern is about the rights of your family member, talk to a senior staff member or use the facility's internal complaints procedure. If unresolved contact the [Aged Rights Advocacy Service](#) on 8232 5377 for information and advice. They may also advocate for you if necessary.

If your concern is based more on an expectation, individual situations can sometimes be negotiated. In this case, you would be asking for a 'favour', rather than advocating for your family member's rights.

*"Josie demanded a room change for George. She got nowhere.
I took a gentle approach and asked for their help."*

Why compliments work

When speaking on behalf of your family member it's just as important to give compliments to staff as it is to raise issues or make complaints.

For residential care staff, the day is spent attending to the needs of others, usually running from one task to the next. Many wish they had time to provide 'extra' care to residents - even just talking to them.

Every so often the extra time is found. At some stage your family member is likely to benefit from additional attention, support or generosity. Acknowledging this by thanking the staff member or paying them a compliment is important.

Complimenting residential care staff may do the following:

- ▣ Make staff feel appreciated.
- ▣ Show them you noticed - and encourage it to happen again.
- ▣ Show them you'll speak up when things are going well - not just when you're unhappy.
- ▣ Help them respond more positively to the next concern you raise.

While a genuine thank you is enough, some carers have become quite creative in how they show their appreciation. Fruit or flowers from the garden are just as nice as a thank you card or chocolates.

How to raise criticisms to get results

Once you're complimenting the staff on what they're doing well, it won't be so hard to raise criticisms and get the results you're after. Here is some advice from carers:

- ☑ Raise issues as they arise - don't let them mount up.
- ☑ Raise your concerns face-to-face with the staff member involved. They may not be aware of the problem, so use a gentle approach.
- ☑ Find the right time. Make an appointment if you have to.
- ☑ Make a suggestion for how the situation could be improved.
- ☑ Don't expect answers on the spot - your concern may require further consideration to resolve.

"Be prepared to work in partnership for your family member."

Carers who rush in with 'all guns firing' generally have a harder time being heard and getting the desired result. This can cause additional stress and frustration - not only for you but for your family member. Take a moment to calm yourself and consider the situation - it will make it easier to deal with.

How to work through conflict

Different views can quickly turn a conversation into conflict. In residential care, this is most common between carers or families and staff when discussing the needs or wants of a family member.

Before it becomes even more heated, it may be useful to consider what it might be like to 'walk in the other person's shoes'. By considering the perspective of the residential care staff, you may be able to work around the difficulties and negotiate a mutually acceptable outcome.

Some tips for dealing with conflict:

- ☑ Talk about the issues and what you want to happen.
- ☑ Try not to use blaming words like "You make me feel...".
- ☑ Let the staff member have their say.
- ☑ Listen actively - this is different to just hearing.
- ☑ Don't expect the staff member to see things as you do.
- ☑ Try not to let it get personal or dredge up the past.
- ☑ Take a deep breath if you need to, to avoid an angry response.

When the conflict is not easily resolved, ask for a family meeting with relevant staff to talk through the issues. This gives everyone time to consider the situation and make suggestions for resolving the problem.

Further information:

- ☑ [Aged Rights Advocacy Service](#) - ph: 8232 5377.
- ☑ [How to make a formal complaint](#) - information sheet.

Contact the [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) 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