Getting to Know Residents In Long-Term Care:
Residents' Unique Identities

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Getting to Know Residents in Long-Term Care

Residents living in long-term care (LTC) homes come from diverse backgrounds, cultures and identities. Relationship building requires empathic understanding and trust. One of the unique and wonderful things about working in LTC is the opportunity to develop rich relationships with residents, and truly get to know them as unique individuals with fascinating histories. Much can be gained from the wisdom of our elders.

Suggestions for Getting to Know Residents

In this handout we outline some suggestions to support getting to know residents, and to help you in beginning to form relationships.

- Take time to introduce yourself and build rapport.
- Show interest, curiosity and take the time to listen when a resident is sharing their stories. They are sharing a beautiful gift with you.
- Provide time for the resident to reflect and answer questions. Remember that some questions may evoke painful memories, or it may just take a bit longer for a resident living with dementia to formulate a response. Be comfortable with a bit of silence, it can be an excellent way to offer a supportive, empathetic presence.
- Ask if you can review the resident's "All About Me" or "PIECES of my Personhood" document to get to know some unique details about the person, their history and what matters to them. Find out from the care team if there is anything about their care plan that you should be aware of". Most homes use one of those tools, or use their own version that they've adapted.
- Take time to read and learn about different cultures' history, foods, traditions, values and practices.
- Examine your biases about people from cultures or backgrounds that may be different from your own.
- Do not assume the relationship of people in the resident's life (e.g., if you see a photo in the resident's room of him with another man, don't assume they are brothers). If relevant, ask the resident to tell you about the person/people in the photo. This provides the resident the opportunity to decide how much they share.
- Ask how you can be of assistance – rather than making assumptions about what a resident may or may not need.
- Avoid making assumptions about a resident's identity based on their appearance.
- Remember that the words we use can have a powerful impact. By using intentional and inclusive language, we can avoid words or expressions that can exclude people or are considered hurtful. LTC homes are moving towards adopting person-centred language.
- It is a good practice to ask a person what their pronouns are. Consider placing a note on the front of the resident's chart and care plan so that all team members will use the correct name, gender and pronouns.

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- Be aware that you can't always tell a person's gender by the way they look. As a general rule, address the person by their appearance (their presenting gender) rather than the name/gender on their health card.
- Don't be afraid of making mistakes–it's inevitable. Apologize and try again. Remember not to be hard on yourself – we are all human and all have growth and learning that will occur on the journey towards inclusion.
- Only request and/or disclose personal information about a resident when it is directly related to their care, and only with members of the circle of care.
- Learn to be an ally. You can do this by speaking up if you hear negative remarks, demeaning jokes, stereotypical or discriminatory comments. Consider displaying that you are an ally to diverse populations by wearing an ally pin or button.
- Make consideration of accessibility needs when communicating with the person – do they utilize any devices or technology to support their hearing, vision or communication? If so, be sure these are available for the resident during all interactions.
- Consider the resident's physical abilities and ensure they have the adaptive equipment they need to maintain and maximize independence (e.g., walker, cane, etc).
- To optimize communication for residents and families whose mother tongue is not the language you speak, or for those who have communication difficulties (including aphasia, developmental disabilities, etc), here are some strategies to support their linguistic needs:
  - arrange for translation services to support resident and family language needs;
  - consider utilizing language cue cards designed for healthcare settings;
  - include languages spoken by team members on name tags;
  - maintain a list of team members that speak different languages and are willing to act as interpreters when translation service is not available.
- Engage in self-reflection of your own values, beliefs and identity, and incorporate feedback that you receive from others.
- Be aware of the disparities and inequities (e.g., access to healthcare, health outcomes) that exist for diverse populations, and consider contributing factors and processes.

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Conversation Starters for Interactions with Residents

I would love to get to know you a little bit.

Would you tell me about your life?

Who are the important people in your life?

Tell me about the country (or community) you were raised in.

What was it like growing up when you did?

What gives you comfort?

What brings you joy?

What matters the most to you?

What three words describe you best?

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