



Deciding for yourself:

A Healthwatch Bucks Good Practice Report on using cues to help care home residents retain independence

At Healthwatch Bucks, we believe that staff at care homes can make a real difference in enabling residents to live as independently as possible. An important part of this is the use of cues, which enable residents to continue to make decisions about their own lives and navigate their environment effectively when their ability to respond to direct questions or information set out in writing, for example, is impaired for any reason.

Over the past 18 months, we have seen and heard about some excellent ways of doing this, so we have compiled this short report to share this good practice and to encourage others to share their ideas too. An experienced staff member will often use these techniques automatically responding to the needs of their residents, but for less experienced staff working through these techniques may be helpful. Some of them may seem simple or obvious, but often it is the little things that count.

1. Give simple alternatives which allow a clear choice both verbally and physically

Question	Cue
Would you like your blue bag or your brown one?	Staff member offers both bags to the resident
Would you like water or tea?	Staff member offers a glass for a cold drink and a mug a hot drink
Would you like to sit in this chair or over there?	Staff member points to a nearby chair and then to one further away?
Would you like to wear your red cardigan or your green cardigan?	Staff member offers both cardigans to the resident

2. Use cues to prompt and encourage conversation

Activity	Cue
Talking with you	Using photo albums or life storybooks to have conversations. These can be a physical book or on an iPad
Engaging kindly with you	Using touch and a smile to reassure Reading peoples faces carefully before launching into a question and expecting an immediate response

3. Use colour as a cue to help residents make effective use of day to day items

Activity	Cue
Eating and drinking	Contrasting/bright colours for eating and drinking utensils (which can also be tailored for example by shape depending on need)
Using mobility aids	Contrasting colours for grab rails in toilets
Using the right room	Different bold colours used on furniture in different lounges

4. Use pictorial or physical prompts instead of words to support decisions

Decision	Cue
What to eat	Picture menus (as well as written ones) and pictures of meals on cards so residents can still help in choosing what is on weekly menus
What to do	Activity schedules showing photos of activities as well as writing
What time is it?	Pyjamas worn by staff at night so that if a resident gets up at night they can easily identify the time of day
Is this the room I want?	A photo of themselves on the door to their room (as long as a relative or resident themselves is happy with this) A picture of a toilet on the bathroom door
Is this mine?	Labels which are visual not verbal e.g. different coloured pom-poms on walkers so they are easily identifiable
Where is my?	Pictures on drawers in a bedroom indicating which clothes can be found in which drawer

These are just some of the techniques in use every day in our care homes which make a real difference to residents lives. At Healthwatch Bucks we know there are more great ideas out

there. Please do comment on this report and share your ideas and experience - so we can all work together to help care home residents and others live with dignity.

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