

Checklist: planning and choosing respite care

This checklist will help you to assess the options available to you and the person you're caring for as well as other things to consider when choosing respite care.

Planning ahead for respite care

If you provide care for someone, it's worth investigating respite care options before you actually need them. In some cases, the need for respite care can occur suddenly, and there won't always be lots of time to research and make decisions.

- Use our care services directory to find care homes or domiciliary care services in your area that may be able to provide respite care.
- Make a few phone calls to identify a shortlist of suitable respite care providers, so you can act quickly if needs be (some homes may also invite you to visit, so that you can see their facilities for yourself - talk to the home manager about this). Be aware that not all care homes can accommodate short-term stays, particularly at short notice, as everything depends on availability of beds/rooms.
- It's also worth planning ahead if you're looking for a suitable day care centre or respite holiday as places can fill quickly and there may be a waiting list.

Care in an emergency

Think about who you could contact in an emergency if you or the regular carer couldn't reach the person needing care, for example, due to an accident or sudden illness. This might be another relative, friend or neighbour who could step in for a few hours while proper arrangements are made. Make sure they:

- hold door keys or know the code to a key safe.
- are familiar with the type of care your loved one will need - this may be as simple as sitting and chatting with the person you care for, or preparing a meal for them or helping them with their medication (if it needs to be taken at a specific time).

It may be helpful to write some care notes and leave them in a prominent place to assist those who step in to help at a moment's notice. These notes could include essential information on medication, and any dos and don'ts for the substitute carer to be aware of.

Checklist: choosing respite care

- Plan ahead:** it's worth thinking about respite care options in advance of when it's needed.
- Emergency contact:** know who you would call in an emergency, keep their details handy and make sure other family members and neighbours have them, too.
- Assessment:** get a local authority needs assessment or professional advice about the type of respite care needed. Both the carer and the cared-for person should have an assessment to make sure that nothing is missed.
- Clarify funding available:** if the needs assessment says you are eligible for care, follow up on the financial assessment.
- Research options:** find out what's available in your area using our care services directory. Remember that availability for respite care may be limited in some areas.
- Type of respite care:** different respite options will suit some people better than others. For example, people with dementia may find it difficult to deal with changes to routine. If you are caring for someone with dementia, you might want to consider respite care that allows them to remain at home with a substitute carer, rather than to move somewhere else.
- Find out costs:** before making any decisions, find out what costs are involved. If the local authority is contributing to the cost of the care of the person you are caring for, there may be additional respite care costs

to consider. Some day centres charge for attendance and might charge extra for transport and meals.

- Clear explanations and joint decisions:** remember that the person being cared for may initially find it difficult or upsetting to be looked after by someone else, especially if they don't like changes to their routine. Any decisions about respite care should be made with the person you care for, wherever possible. Talk to them about their preferences and discuss the options. Explain why the respite care is needed and what is involved.
- Consider the cared-for person's interests:** if you're trying to arrange day care or a short break, talk together about what they would enjoy. Try to match clubs to their hobbies and interests.
- Specific needs:** make sure that any day centres or respite care can accommodate the cared-for person's needs. For example, if they're in a wheelchair, make sure that the chosen day centre is accessible. Or, if they have dementia, make sure that any staff employed to take care of them have the necessary experience and training to deal with this.
- Meet prospective care workers:** if possible, try to meet any paid carers who might provide care while you're away. Make sure that you and the person needing care are happy with them.
- Visit potential respite providers:** before making any decisions, try to visit the day centres or care homes on your shortlist to get an idea of what they're like. If possible, take the person needing care with you and make sure they understand what is going on. Ask about mealtimes, routines and social events. If you're arranging emergency respite care, there may not always be time to visit. We have checklists for questions to ask care home managers and domiciliary care agencies that might help you here.
- Check the room:** if you're considering residential respite care, ask to take a look at the particular room your loved one might stay in, as well as any communal areas. It's important to pass on information about any mobility aids, such as bars required to help them get in and out of bed.

- Background checks:** make a background check with the Care Quality Commission (or relevant regulatory body in your country) for information about the care provider (see our information about the quality and regulations of care providers).
- Check contract terms:** when arranging residential or domiciliary respite care, you should be given a contract stating the details of care, and any other terms and conditions. This should include information about notice periods, cancellation clauses and (if applicable) bank holiday payments. It's important to read this carefully before signing. If you're not offered a written contract make sure you ask for one - see also our advice on care home contracts.
- Check the benefits situation:** find out how the benefits you or the person you care for receive might be affected by respite care. For example, your Carer's Allowance may be affected if you take breaks over a certain amount of time, or Attendance Allowance might be stopped if the cared-for person is being supported by the local authority.

Extra notes/comments