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Knowledge Hub

Professional Resources for Care, Catering & Hospitality

FREE PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Encouraging Positive Mealtime Experiences in Care Settings

A Professional Awareness Guide for Care Staff

Knowledge Hub Resource 012

Version 1.0

First Published: July 2026

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Part of the FlexiLearnHub Professional Knowledge Lib

About This Resource

Encouraging Positive Mealtime Experiences in Care Settings

A Professional Awareness Guide for Care Staff

Supporting Dignity, Wellbeing and Person-Centred Care

Mealtimes are an important part of everyday life. Beyond providing nutrition and hydration, they offer opportunities for social interaction, independence, comfort and enjoyment. A positive mealtime experience can contribute significantly to an individual's physical health, emotional wellbeing and overall quality of life.

In care settings, every individual should be supported to enjoy meals in a way that respects their personal preferences, cultural background, independence and dignity. Creating a calm, welcoming and person-centred mealtime environment helps individuals feel valued while encouraging confidence and participation wherever possible.

This professional awareness guide has been developed by **FlexiLearnHub** to help care staff understand the importance of positive mealtime experiences and how simple everyday actions can make a meaningful difference to those receiving care.

Purpose of this Resource

This guide aims to help readers:

✓ Understand why positive mealtime experiences are important.

✓ Promote dignity, choice and person-centred care during meals.

✓ Create a calm and welcoming dining environment.

✓ Encourage independence wherever possible.

✓ Support effective communication and teamwork during mealtimes.

Suitable For

- Care Assistants
- Senior Care Staff
- Support Workers
- Healthcare Assistants
- Nurses
- Care Home Managers
- Catering Teams
- Family Carers

Important Information

This guide provides professional awareness only. Care staff should always follow individual care plans, organisational policies and procedures when supporting people during mealtimes. Any concerns relating to eating, drinking, nutrition, hydration or swallowing should be reported promptly using local procedures and referred to the appropriate healthcare professional where required.

Continue Learning

Expand your knowledge through the **FlexiLearnHub Nutrition & Hydration in Care Settings (CPD Accredited)** course together with our growing collection of free professional awareness guides designed to support best practice across the care sector.

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Why Positive Mealtimes Matter

Mealtimes are an important part of daily life and should be recognised as more than simply an opportunity to eat and drink. For many individuals receiving care, they provide valuable moments for social interaction, maintaining independence and enjoying familiar routines that contribute to overall wellbeing.

A positive mealtime experience can help individuals feel comfortable, respected and included, while also encouraging a healthy appetite and greater enjoyment of food and drink.

The Benefits of Positive Mealtimes

Well-planned, person-centred mealtimes can help to:

✓ Encourage individuals to eat and drink well.

✓ Promote dignity, choice and independence.

✓ Support emotional wellbeing and reduce feelings of isolation.

✓ Create opportunities for conversation and social interaction.

✓ Help individuals feel relaxed and comfortable.

✓ Contribute to an enjoyable daily routine.

Every individual has different preferences, abilities and support needs. Taking time to understand these differences helps ensure each mealtime is as positive and meaningful as possible.

Seeing the Person, Not Just the Meal

Person-centred care means recognising that every individual has their own:

- Food likes and dislikes.
- Cultural or religious preferences.
- Daily routines and mealtime habits.
- Communication needs.
- Level of independence.
- Personal choices about where, when and how they eat whenever this can be safely supported.

Respecting these preferences helps individuals maintain dignity and supports a more enjoyable mealtime experience.

The Role of Care Staff

Care staff make an important contribution to creating positive mealtimes through their attitude, communication and support.

Simple actions such as offering encouragement, allowing sufficient time to eat, listening to individual preferences and providing assistance in a respectful manner can make a significant difference to an individual's confidence and enjoyment during meals.

Key Message

Positive mealtimes are about much more than nutrition. They provide opportunities to promote dignity, independence, social interaction and overall wellbeing while supporting each individual's personal preferences and quality of life.

Creating a Supportive Mealtime Environment

The environment in which meals are served can have a significant impact on an individual's enjoyment of food and drink. A calm, comfortable and welcoming atmosphere helps people feel relaxed, encourages social interaction and may support a better eating experience.

Small changes to the dining environment can make a meaningful difference, particularly for individuals living with dementia, reduced mobility, sensory impairments or anxiety.

Creating a Positive Dining Experience

Care staff can help create an enjoyable mealtime by:

✓ Providing a clean, comfortable and welcoming dining area.

✓ Reducing unnecessary noise and distractions where possible.

✓ Allowing individuals enough time to eat at their own pace.

✓ Encouraging social interaction while respecting those who prefer a quieter environment.

✓ Ensuring meals are served in an appealing and appetising manner.

✓ Supporting individuals discreetly and respectfully when assistance is required.

A calm and organised mealtime environment helps individuals focus on enjoying their meal and promotes dignity and comfort.

Respecting Individual Preferences

Every person has their own routines, habits and preferences.

Wherever possible, care staff should support individuals by respecting their:

- Preferred meal times.
- Favourite foods and drinks.
- Cultural and religious dietary preferences.
- Personal routines.
- Seating preferences.
- Choice to eat independently or receive assistance when needed.

Providing person-centred support helps individuals maintain independence and feel valued throughout the mealtime experience.

Working Together

Positive mealtimes are achieved through good teamwork.

Care staff, catering teams, kitchen staff and managers all contribute to creating an environment where individuals feel comfortable, respected and supported. Good communication helps ensure dietary requirements, personal preferences and individual care plans are consistently followed.

Key Message

A positive mealtime environment is created through kindness, patience, good communication and attention to individual needs. Small everyday actions can make mealtimes more enjoyable, promote dignity and enhance an individual's overall wellbeing.

Communication, Dignity and Person-Centred Care

Every mealtime provides an opportunity to demonstrate compassionate, person-centred care. The way care staff communicate, offer assistance and respond to individual needs can have a significant impact on a person's confidence, comfort and enjoyment during meals.

Treating every individual with dignity and respect helps promote independence, encourages participation and supports a positive relationship with food and drink.

Supporting Individuals with Respect

Care staff can promote dignity during mealtimes by:

✓ Speaking calmly, clearly and respectfully.

✓ Offering choices wherever possible.

✓ Encouraging independence while providing assistance only when needed.

✓ Respecting personal preferences and individual routines.

✓ Allowing sufficient time for meals without rushing.

✓ Maintaining privacy and dignity when support is required.

Every individual should feel valued, listened to and involved in decisions about their mealtime experience whenever possible.

The Importance of Good Communication

Effective communication helps ensure that everyone involved in an individual's care understands their nutritional needs, dietary requirements and personal preferences.

Care staff should:

- Share relevant information with colleagues.
- Record any changes in eating or drinking habits.
- Report concerns promptly using local procedures.
- Work closely with catering teams and healthcare professionals.
- Follow individual care plans at all times.

Good communication supports continuity of care and helps ensure individuals receive consistent, person-centred support.

Making Every Mealtime Count

Simple acts of kindness can have a lasting impact.

Taking time to sit with an individual, offering encouragement, respecting personal choices and creating a relaxed atmosphere can help transform an ordinary meal into a positive and meaningful experience.

By recognising that mealtimes are about much more than food alone, care staff help promote health, wellbeing, dignity and quality of life.

Key Message

Positive mealtime experiences are created through kindness, patience, respect and effective communication. Every meal is an opportunity to support dignity, encourage independence and enhance an individual's wellbeing through person-centred care.

Continue Your Learning

Continuing Professional Development

Creating positive mealtime experiences is an important part of delivering safe, compassionate and person-centred care. By promoting dignity, encouraging independence and supporting enjoyable mealtimes, care staff can make a meaningful difference to an individual's health, wellbeing and quality of life.

Every interaction during a meal provides an opportunity to support not only good nutrition and hydration, but also confidence, comfort and social wellbeing. Continuing professional development helps care teams build knowledge, strengthen skills and maintain high standards of care.

Continue Your Learning with FlexiLearnHub

Expand your knowledge through our growing range of **CPD-accredited** and **CQC-aligned** online training courses, including:

✓ Nutrition & Hydration in Care Settings

✓ Dysphagia Awareness & the IDDSI Framework

✓ Advanced IDDSI Level 4 Professional Purée Presentation & Plating

✓ Food Safety & Hygiene Level 2

✓ HACCP Level 2

✓ Infection Prevention & Control

✓ Dementia Awareness

✓ End of Life Care Awareness

Designed to support continuous professional development, workplace compliance and excellence in care and catering.

Related Knowledge Hub Resources

🔵 Nutrition & Hydration Resources

📄 Resource 007 – Preventing Dehydration in Care Settings

📄 Resource 008 – Encouraging Good Nutrition in Care Settings

📄 Resource 009 – Supporting Individuals with a Poor Appetite

📄 Resource 010 – Healthy Snacks and Nourishing Drinks in Care Settings

📄 Resource 011 – Understanding Malnutrition Awareness in Care Settings

📄 Resource 012 – Encouraging Positive Mealtime Experiences in Care Settings

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🟠 Dysphagia & IDDSI Awareness Series

📄 Resource 002 – Understanding the IDDSI Framework

📄 Resource 003 – Recognising the Signs of Dysphagia

📄 Resource 004 – Supporting Safe Mealtimes for People with Dysphagia

📄 Resource 005 – Texture-Modified Food Awareness

📄 Resource 006 – Helping Someone Eat and Drink Safely

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About FlexiLearnHub

FlexiLearnHub provides professional online training, downloadable workplace resources and practical awareness guides for the care, catering and hospitality sectors.

Our mission is to make high-quality learning accessible, practical and affordable while supporting safer workplaces, continuous professional development and excellence in care.

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Publication Information

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Version 1.0

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