



*The "Heart of Excellence"*



**#501, 5920- Macleod Trail SW  
Calgary Alberta, T2H 0K2  
Tel: 403-255-4969  
Fax: 403-252-6591**

**Website: [www.intercarealberta.com](http://www.intercarealberta.com)**

**Brentwood Care Centre  
2727 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW  
Calgary, Alberta  
T2N 3Y6  
(403) 289-2576**

**Chinook Care Centre  
1261 Glenmore Trail SW  
Calgary, Alberta  
T2V 4Y8  
(403) 252-0141**

**Southwood Care Centre  
211 Heritage Drive SE  
Calgary, Alberta  
T2H 1M9  
(403) 252-1194**



*Visiting Techniques  
Handbook*



---

## Table of Contents

---

2	Intercare's Purpose, Vision and Values	16	Intergenerational Visiting <i>Preparing Younger Family Members</i>
3	Introduction		
4	Goals of Visiting	19	Gifts
5	Who & When Should Visit	20	Commonly Asked Questions
7	Why Visiting may be Difficult	22	Special Considerations
9	What to do on a Visit	23	Questions/Concerns
11	Helpful Visiting Suggestions	24	Checklist for a Successful Visit
13	Where to Visit	25	Resources
14	Improving Communication <i>How to Communicate During Visits</i>		



*This Book is dedicated to the families and faithful friends who come and visit the residents at any one of our Intercare Sites.*

*Revised  
July 2017*

---

**Intercare's Purpose**

---

To maintain dignity, offer choice, support growth and honour those we serve.

---

**Intercare's Vision**

---

Intercare is the:

*“Heart of Excellence”-*

To be recognized as the first choice provider of continuing care services.

---

**Intercare's Values**

---

<b>Respect</b>	Honouring each other as individuals
<b>Compassion</b>	Responsive to the needs of others – sharing joy, laughter and tears
<b>Commitment</b>	Responsible and accountable for the safety and quality of services we provide
<b>Ethics</b>	Conduct based on integrity, openness and trust
<b>Service</b>	Recognizing that every interaction leaves a lasting impression



---

## Introduction

---

This booklet is designed to help make visiting a little easier and perhaps more rewarding for you and your loved one or friend. We encourage you to consider some of the suggestions outlined in this booklet. Some will be more helpful than others, but we hope the booklet will assist in making your visits a positive experience.



---

## Checklist for a Successful Visit

---

1. Did the resident seem to enjoy and/or benefit from the visit?
  - ♥ Did the visit provide the resident with some fun and give him or her something to look forward to?
  - ♥ Did the visit help to keep the resident connected to family or the community?
  - ♥ Was the visit stimulating for the resident, both mentally and physically?
  - ♥ Did the visit help the resident feel loved and supported?
  - ♥ Did you see anything on the visit that caused you to feel concerned about the care provided to the resident or to anyone else on the unit?
  - ♥ Did you complete a **Feedback Form** outlining your concerns or your compliments?
2. What was the best part of the visit? What was the worst part? What would you change on future visits?
3. How did you feel about the visit? Are you looking forward to the next visit?
4. Are you feeling resentful that other members of the family do not visit as often as you do?
5. Do you need to take a break from visiting or adjust other responsibilities to allow yourself some quality time?

---

## What if You Have Questions or Concerns?

---

At Intercare, health and safety is everyone's responsibility. Active participation by family members and visitors is necessary for the achievement of excellence in quality of care and patient safety that Intercare expects within all of its facilities and programs.

As a visitor to one of our facilities, you play an important role in ensuring that residents receive quality care. If you see or hear anything that you have questions or concerns about, discuss it with the staff or a manager as soon as possible. Alternatively, please feel free to complete a **Feedback Form** and a staff member will respond back to you.

---

## Goals of Visiting

---

Visiting is about being together with people you care about, sharing present events and reflecting on past memories. Visits can also provide an opportunity to heal past hurts and grow closer together.

In general, people visit to:

- ♥ Give the resident something to look forward to
- ♥ Help stay connected and in contact with the resident
- ♥ Stimulate physical and mental health
- ♥ Maintain the resident's sense of dignity and self worth
- ♥ Promote feelings of achievement and importance
- ♥ Provide company, friendship, support, reassurance and help
- ♥ Make sure the resident is receiving good care



To assist you, we have included a section called Checklist for a Successful Visit on Page 24 of this booklet.

---

## When and Who Should Visit

---

Intercare is committed to providing a safe, secure, respectful and caring environment for all residents, families, visitors and staff. Individuals who fail to comply with Intercare's commitment to the provision of a safe, respectful environment will be asked to leave the premises. **(See Intercare's Respectful Workplace – Code of Conduct Policy that is posted throughout all sites.)**

Intercare facilities generally have very few restrictions regarding who can visit and when. Young children and pets are usually welcome. **However, Pets are not allowed in areas where food is served and must be under the control of the owner at all times. Dogs MUST be on a leash.**

When planning a visit, you may need to consider certain factors such as:

- ♥ Does the resident have a “good” or “bad” time of day? For example, there is no point in visiting in the afternoon if the resident can't stay awake during this time.
- ♥ Does the resident have any scheduled appointment times with the physician or other specialists that would interfere with your visit? If you visit during these times, you'll spend most of the visit waiting for the resident to finish with or come back from an appointment.
- ♥ Is there a special recreation program that you would like to attend with the resident?
- ♥ Does the resident have a special recreation program that he or she would like to attend, but won't or can't while you are visiting?

---

## Special Considerations

---

### ***Comatose or Severely Cognitively Impaired Residents***

You may wonder if there is any point in visiting residents who are comatose or who have experienced severe memory changes.

The questions you might ask are:

- ♥ How can I tell if the resident knows I have visited?
- ♥ How do I know if the resident benefited from the time spent visiting?

It is impossible to answer such questions with certainty. However, you may find it comforting to know that many professionals who work in this area believe that the person does know, at some level, that someone is present and offering support. And even though there is no way to tell if there is benefit to the resident, coming to see the resident may benefit you by helping you to work through grief issues. Visiting is also important in ensuring that the resident is receiving good care.

### ***A Resident Who is Dying***

At this time, visiting can be vitally important. By holding the resident's hand or offering ice chips, you are providing emotional support through this difficult time. Being present at a dying resident's bedside also provides the visitor with the opportunity to grieve and to come to terms with the pending death. If you find, however, that you are feeling overwhelmed by your grief during this difficult time, please ask to speak to the facility chaplain or social worker for support.

family issues, whether good or bad. Being part of a family involves both the good things and the bad things in life. Just because the resident is physically removed from the family doesn't mean that he or she should be excluded.

As we can never be certain about the depth of understanding of an individual who has experienced severe memory changes, even they should be told about family issues. However, little is gained by repeating information they find distressing. With this population, it is often advisable to tell them once and then, unless they ask, don't raise the issue again.

Planning when and how you will deliver bad news is important because, like you, residents may feel overwhelmed. It is important they receive the necessary support at the time the news is delivered and afterwards.

**Questions that you need to consider are:**

- ♥ Will you have the time and do you feel emotionally strong enough yourself to both give the news and to support the resident afterwards as he or she copes with it?

**If not:**

- ♥ Can you give the resident the news when a favorite staff person, chaplain or the social worker is available to be with you? These individuals will be able to provide support to the resident.
- ♥ Can staff, the chaplain or the social worker provide the resident with support in the days after you have given the bad news?

Whenever and however bad news is relayed to a resident, it is also important to give the details to staff. Then, if the resident is distraught in the coming hours or days, staff will be able to provide the appropriate care and support.

- ♥ Does the resident have other regular visitors? Can these visits be spread out through the week/month? One visitor at a time may be more enjoyable for the resident than multiple visitors all at once. When a number of visitors come at one time, the resident may feel overwhelmed or get left out while the visitors talk to each other.



- ♥ Is there a special visitor (for example, someone from out-of-town) visiting during the week? If so, maybe this is a good week for you to take a well-deserved break.
- ♥ If you are feeling guilty because the resident claims that visitors never come (but you know that they do!), keep a calendar or guest book in the room for all visitors to sign. Then, when the resident says that he or she never has any visitors, you can show him or her who has visited and when. This will comfort and help the resident remember that he or she does get visits.

---

## Why Visiting May Be Difficult

---

Like many other family members and friends, you may find it difficult to visit someone who has moved into a long-term care centre. Some reasons why the visits may feel difficult could include:

- ♥ ***A feeling of uneasiness about the environment in long term care centres.***
- ♥ ***Difficulty interacting with a family member or friend because of the physical and/or cognitive changes of the resident.***

***It is important to identify what it is that actually makes you feel uncomfortable:***

Is it the ***physical environment*** of the care facility that bothers you? Visiting on a regular basis may actually help to reduce or minimize your discomfort. People often find that once they become familiar with the environment, they become more comfortable in it. If you can't get over your unease, find a spot for your visit that seems less institutional, such as the resident's room, a lounge or garden area.

Is it the resident's ***physical and/or memory changes*** that disturbs you? We are often most uncomfortable with things we don't understand or that we don't know how to cope with. Learning about the resident's disability and its effects on the person can help. Try to obtain information on how to interact with the resident. Staff at the care facility can be important resources in helping you learn how to overlook the disability and make the most of the remaining strengths of the resident.

---

## Commonly Asked Questions

---

### ***How often should I visit:***

There is no right answer to this question. Only you can decide on the right amount of time you should spend visiting. One must consider the other demands in your life (job, other family), as well as your own health. If you are not taking time to maintain good physical and emotional health for yourself, you will not be able to bring your best to the visit. Sometimes fewer, but better quality visits are the best compromise.

### **Remember:**

- ♥ Never say you are going to visit if you really are not planning to.
- ♥ If you promised to visit at a specific time, but now can't visit at that time, notify the resident that you won't be there. Don't leave the resident waiting.



If you are having trouble determining how often you should visit, speak to unit staff, the social worker or the recreation therapist. Their input may help.

### ***Should I tell my family member if something bad has happened to someone in the family (e.g. death or divorce)?***

There can never be an absolutely right answer to this because there are always unique considerations in every situation. But, as a general rule, all family members should be advised about

---

## Gifts

---

The tradition of giving gifts to celebrate special occasions can easily be continued for the residents. If you are having trouble thinking of gift ideas, here are some suggestions:

**Appropriate Clothing** - staff can assist you in determining what clothing would be appropriate. Safety in footwear and ease of dressing in clothing should be considered.

**Toiletries** - such as hand lotion, nice shampoo, perfume, soaps, shaver, a hair brush.

**Photos** – either an old photo of something of significance to the resident or a new family photo.

**Food** – taking into consideration any current dietary restriction. Please remember to bring food items in a resealable container and only bring enough for one or two days.

**Audio Tapes** – of talking books or music.

**Gift Certificates**

**Calendars**

**Large Print Books,**

**Magazine or Newspaper Subscriptions**

**Handi-Bus/Taxi Passes**

**Plants** – please note that staff do not have the time to care of residents' plants and the resident may not be able to do this themselves. If you give a resident a plant, you will need to assume the responsibility for caring for it. Artificial flower arrangements may be more appropriate.

Is it the **emotional aspects** of the visit that are difficult? Try to determine what it is about the situation that is causing you emotional distress.

- ♥ People are admitted to long term care facilities because their care needs are beyond what can be provided at home by their family, even with supports. This reality can cause great emotional distress and feelings of guilt, anger and grief in both you and the resident. Visits can bring out these emotions.
- ♥ If your past relationship with the resident was stressful and there are unresolved points of pain in your relationship, you may be trying to resolve these issues during your visits. These visits can become difficult because of the expectations and emotions that you bring. You may need to accept that you are not going to be able to heal past pains.

Understanding and coming to terms with our emotions can ease the stress of a visit. Individual counseling or joining a support group may be helpful. Speak to the long term care facility's Social Worker about resources that are available to you.

---

## What to do on a Visit

- ♥ Do you find the visit boring?
- ♥ Does the visit follow the same pattern time after time?
- ♥ Are you watching the clock throughout the visit waiting for a time when it would be acceptable for you to leave?
- ♥ Is the resident sleeping through most of your visit?



If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are not alone.

**The objective of visiting a resident is to provide the best quality of life possible for the resident, within the resident's limitations.**



---

## Saying Goodbye

You may find that saying “goodbye” at the end of a visit is the most difficult part of the time together. For the resident, feelings of grief and abandonment may surface when the loved one leaves. For you, the visitor, leaving may bring out feelings of guilt. There are many approaches you can try to ease the transition of leaving. You’ll have to determine which one will be best in your situation.

**Set the parameters:** Some people find that setting the parameters of the visit, either before the visit or at the start of it, helps. For example: *“Mother, when I come for my visit on Sunday, I can stay from 2 to 4 p.m.”* In other situations, not discussing the departure until the actual time works better.

**Be Consistent:** For some residents, consistency in the timing of your visits can be helpful in developing a routine. The resident then becomes accustomed to when you will be leaving.

**Plan an Activity:** Providing the resident with something else to do at the moment you leave may make the leaving easier (e.g. turn on the TV for a favorite program, go to the common area where there are other people to visit with, join a scheduled recreation program).

**Asking Staff for Help:** Request that the staff assist you in distracting the resident while you leave.

**Focus on the Positive:** Don’t focus on “I am leaving” but rather on “I will see you soon.”

**Provide Reassurance:** Reassure the resident that you care. Try a hug.

**Leave Quietly:** While it is usually better to tell the resident that you are leaving, in certain cases (e.g. a severely cognitively impaired resident) it does work better if you just leave without saying goodbye.

## Preparing Younger Family Members:

- ♥ Describe what they are likely to see (people in wheelchairs, beds, confused people wandering, etc.).
- ♥ Listen to their concerns and perceptions.
- ♥ Answer all of their questions.
- ♥ Acknowledge their fears/concerns.
- ♥ Separate the visit into “segments” and address how the child might feel and respond to each segment (e.g. entering the centre, interacting with staff and other residents, being in the room with Grandma, how Grandma has changed, etc.).



## ***Adjusting activities for the physically frail:***

Many residents are physically frail. You may be afraid that an activity is too strenuous for the resident. While some activities may be very exhausting or difficult, even the most physically frail person needs enjoyment and activity in his or her life.

Participating in recreation programs and other activities during your visits can provide the resident with something interesting to do.

If you have an idea for an activity, but are worried about whether the resident can physically cope with it, discuss your idea(s) with the resident and staff. Most interests or activities can be adjusted. For example, perhaps the resident was an avid gardener, but now has limited ability to move. You can help the resident to maintain this special interest by visiting with the resident in a garden area, attending a gardening show or by bringing in some flowers for holding and smelling. If you don't know how to adjust an activity to the appropriate functional level for the resident, ask staff for assistance.



---

## Helpful Visiting Suggestions

---

**Be Creative:** Don't do the same activity over and over again. Try different activities. Talk to the recreational or occupational therapist to get ideas.

**Consider Past Interest and Hobbies:** If you base an activity on a past interest, you will likely get a positive response from the resident.

**Use an Activity Jar:** Make a fun event out of pulling a suggested activity for the next visit out of an activity jar in the resident's room.

### **Stimulate the Senses:**

- ♥ **Hearing** - Listen to favorite music or new music; read aloud passages from books, newspapers, letters from friends/relatives; go outside and listen to the sounds of nature or traffic.
- ♥ **Sight** - Look through magazines or photo albums; use seasonal decorations to brighten the resident's room; spend some time window gazing.
- ♥ **Touch** - Bring in a baby or a puppy for the resident to hold; encourage the handling of fabrics of different textures; rub lotion on the resident's hands, back or feet; bring seasonal objects for the resident to touch, such as leaves, flowers, snow, etc.
- ♥ **Smell** - Bring in a variety of herbs; visit a baker; bake or cook a favorite food for the resident.
- ♥ **Taste** - Arrange for snacks with a variety of textures, flavors and temperatures (hot, cold, sweet, sour, crunchy, smooth) or bring in a home cooked meal. **Note: Before providing food to the resident, check with staff about any dietary restrictions.**

---

## Intergenerational Visiting

---

An important part of remaining connected to one's family is to have contact with members of all generations of that family.



For example, it is important for the resident to maintain contact with grandchildren after placement in one of our care centres, especially if the resident enjoyed a close relationship before. In such cases, loss of contact with grandchildren may be perceived by the resident as abandonment or punishment.

But it's not just the resident who can benefit from intergenerational visits: younger family members also benefit from seeing older family members, even after they are ill and frail. Visits with a grandparent show that families can stay committed to all of its members. These visits also show younger family members that the life cycle is a natural process.

Very young children rarely react negatively to older or ill people, but may be fearful of going into strange environments. Older children and teenagers may respond negatively to illness or disability and may need time and assistance in adjusting.

Your reaction to visiting and to aging in general will have an effect on children. If you can show them, through modeling, that visiting with an older relative or friend can be rewarding and worthwhile, then the children's visits are more likely to be positive, intergenerational experiences for everyone.

- ♥ If the resident has trouble expressing him or herself:
  - Make a reasoned guess at what the person is trying to say and see if he or she concurs with a nod of the head.
  - Try to avoid asking information – seeking questions, such as: “What did you do today?”
  - Instead of questions, use statements such as: “you look nice today” or “that is a pretty sweater”.
  
- ♥ If the resident has experienced memory changes:
  - Use a calm, reassuring voice.
  - Use short, simple sentences.
  - Speak clearly.
  - Break down instructions into steps. Give instructions one step at a time.
  - Provide visual cues through gestures or pictures.
  - Don't give too many choices.
  - Watch the resident's non-verbal communication for clues.
  - As language skills deteriorate, place less emphasis on expecting answers and more emphasis on how much the resident appears to achieve contentment and pleasure from the conversation.
  - Be receptive to changes in mood or behaviour and adjust what you do and say accordingly.

We tend to think of communication as “talking.” But remember, non - verbal communication is equally, if not more important.

***Remember: You don't have to fill every second of the visit with conversation. Just being together may be enough.***

**Reminiscence:** This is one of the most important of all activities. Through reminiscence, you and your relative/friend can better appreciate the resident's life. For the resident, reminiscence can validate his or her life and the uniqueness of that life. Here are some ways to help the resident to reminisce:

- ♥ Review old photo albums, books and magazines together.
- ♥ Encourage the resident to tell stories about his or her earlier life.
- ♥ Compare and contrast how the resident did the tasks of daily living (cooking, housekeeping, getting to work, etc.) with how it is done today.
- ♥ Look at old objects or pictures of old objects. Discuss the role of the object in the resident's life.
- ♥ Make a Life History board together.
- ♥ Visit places of past significance to the resident, family or the community.

### **CAUTION**

In this pamphlet, we have encouraged you to be creative in the activities that you and the resident participate in. However, for some residents with memory changes, a definite routine works best and variation in that routine may be upsetting for the resident. If you find the resident becomes distressed by new activities - or even by leaving the unit - you may have to restrict your activities. Discuss your concerns with the staff. They will be able to assist you in developing a specific plan of activities that is appropriate for the resident.

---

## Where to Visit

---

While visiting in a resident's room may provide you with much needed privacy, visiting from time to time in other locations around the care centre will avoid possible boredom. (Use your imagination to pick places to visit. Varying where you visit can also add different activities to your list.)

### For example:

- ♥ Sit by a window and discuss what you see.
- ♥ Join in with a unit activity program.
- ♥ Visit in the lobby or in one of the lounges.
- ♥ Walk in the hallways.
- ♥ Go outside!
- ♥ Bring the resident to your house or go to a local mall or tourist attraction.
- ♥ Perhaps the resident would appreciate seeing a movie, concert, hockey game, or to go for an evening out!
- ♥ Take the resident out for a meal or tea at a restaurant. (Make sure you avoid peak times and check with staff about any dietary restrictions).



Residents may go out on social leave at any time. However, for resident security purposes, ***staff must be notified*** in advance of the resident leaving the care centre and upon their return to the care centre. **Appropriate entries must be made in the “Sign-In/Sign-Out” book upon leaving and returning.** Check with the Nurse and ensure you sign the in/out book on the Unit.

---

## Improving Communication

---

An important component of every visit is the communication that occurs between you and the resident. Try to minimize any communication problems that are caused by the resident's:

- ♥ sensory deficits (hearing, vision)
- ♥ physical disabilities
- ♥ memory changes

### Here are some suggestions:

- ♥ Learn all you can about the specific communication problems that the resident has, along with action you can take to reduce the effect of the problems. (For example, should you sit on a certain side of the person to accommodate a hearing loss?)
- ♥ Create a comfortable environment, physically and emotionally, for both of you.
- ♥ Place yourself at eye level with the resident.
- ♥ Use your normal conversational voice when speaking.
- ♥ Do not talk “baby talk”
- ♥ If you or the resident needs a hearing aid, glasses or a communication board, make sure they are in place and working before you start.
- ♥ If the resident doesn't understand what you are saying, try using different words.
- ♥ Be patient – the resident may need extra time to take in the information, understand and come up with a reply or response.