

Background

The role of the Essential Care Supporter was introduced in the legislation known as Anne's Law. Some care home residents have visitors who are more important to them than others. These visitors can be important enough that not being able to see them, even during exceptional circumstances such as an infectious outbreak, could cause harm to those residents.

It recognises the important role that many family members and friends play in supporting wellbeing, identity, communication, and continuity of care.

What is an Essential Care Supporter?

An Essential Care Supporter will often be the person or people who play the most significant role in the resident's life. Essential Care Supporters do not have to carry out any specific tasks or role, however they may provide:

- emotional support and companionship
- support with communication or decision-making
- support with eating, personal care or other day-to-day needs
- help with maintaining identity, culture, or relationships.

Essential Care Supporters can work integrally with the care team for their loved one and are considered part of the person's care and support – they are not simply visitors.

Why is it important?

Maintaining meaningful connection with loved ones is vital to emotional, mental and physical health and wellbeing. When this is restricted, it can lead to:

- increased distress, anxiety and low mood
- cognitive decline, particularly when people are living with dementia
- deterioration in physical health and nutrition
- loss of identity and connection.

Decisions about visiting suspensions should always consider both:

- the risk to health and safety, and
- the risk of harm from isolation or distress.

What does it mean for care homes?

Care homes should support residents (and their representatives, where appropriate) to identify who they would like as an Essential Care Supporter. There is no limit to the number of Essential Care Supporters that a person can choose.

This should be recorded in the personal plan, along with relevant contact details and any other relevant information.

Care homes should support people to identify at least one Essential Care Supporter, unless this is against the resident's wishes or there is no-one able to fill the role.

In a small number of situations, it may not be appropriate for a person to take on the role of Essential Care Supporter, for instance if there are concerns about the safety or wellbeing of the resident or others. Any such decision must be based on a clear, individual assessment, take account of the resident's views and rights, and be recorded and kept under regular review. Care homes should clearly explain the reasons for the decision and consider whether alternative arrangements can support the resident to maintain connection.

Visiting and the Essential Care Supporter

In most cases, visiting arrangements will feel the same as usual. However, if visiting is suspended for any reason (such as an infectious outbreak), it is presumed that the suspension of visits to or by a resident's Essential Care Supporter would be likely to cause serious harm to the resident's health or wellbeing. People can therefore expect care homes to take all reasonable steps to enable these visits to continue. They should also expect clear information about the reasons for and expected duration of any suspension, and about how to request a review if they wish to do so.

Essential Care Supporters should follow any reasonable safety measures as advised by the care home, such as infection prevention and control measures (for example, the use of personal protective equipment such as face masks).

Where can I find more information?

- The [Anne's Law Code of Practice](#) - explains how Anne's Law should work day-to-day
- The [Care Inspectorate's Meaningful Connection guidance](#)
- The [Care Inspectorate's Anne's Law factsheet](#)