



Dignity of Risk

Disclaimer: This video is designed to be a conversation starter on the topic of dignity of risk in a remote aged care context. The facilitator should make use of other resources to ensure the learner continues to develop their understanding and competency of this topic.

As people get older, they generally experience increasing frailty; this often means that family, friends and care staff feel a heightened need to protect the person. While this is well-meaning, older people have been making decisions about what they do, where they go and who they interact with for many years. Because they are now older and potentially frailer doesn't mean that decision-making should be taken away from them, we want them to experience the dignity of risk.

Dignity of risk is another way of saying that a person has the right to live the life they choose, even if those choices may involve some risk.

What about duty of care?

When people want to participate in activities and understand the risks involved, staff should be vigilant but not put blocks in their way by being overly cautious simply because we are concerned about our duty of care.

Yes, we acknowledge our duty of care to people accessing our services, but it's not our right to control their actions or decisions, but rather to help by providing support and information so they can make 'informed choices about their care and services and live the life they choose.'

Informed choice

In the video's first scenario, one of the people accessing aged care services, Jack, expresses a desire to use alternative medicine to address a health condition; this concerns the worker, Lance, who refers it to his supervisor, Enid.

Enid understands Jack's wish to use alternative medicine but also realises that this approach might not be as effective and may be something that could infect other people at the centre. She discusses the problem with him, highlights the issues, and suggests options he might want to consider.

With the additional information from Enid, Jack chooses to visit the clinic, get the health condition checked, and get some cream that addresses the issue quickly; this is an informed choice.

It is always good to follow organisation processes and complete relevant paperwork when helping a person to make an informed choice; this is good practice.

- *Talk about examples of informed choice at your workplace if you can think of any.*
- *Show any policies, procedures and forms that help guide staff working in the organisation to help a person make an informed choice and record the decision.*



Helping a person live the life they choose

In the second scenario, the service looks for a way to help a person continue accessing something that has significant meaning in their life.

The person, Alice, has grown up sitting around a campfire. The fire allows Alice to cook her own meal, make tea or damper or provide warmth on a colder day, and it is also linked to older memories.

While the family might be uncomfortable about the risk, denying Alice access to a fire can negatively impact on her well-being and independence.

The staff at the service talked about the problem and identified a potential solution that would allow Alice to continue to use a fire independently while improving safety. As a result, they have been able to find a way to support Alice in living the life she chooses.

- *Talk about why dignity of risk is important to people receiving support from your service.*
- *Talk about examples of staff supporting a person to exercise dignity of risk at your workplace.*
- *Show the staff member any policies, procedures and forms that support dignity of risk.*

Code of Conduct for Aged Care

All Aged Care staff must understand and follow the Code of Conduct for Aged Care. The Code supports the idea of dignity of risk.

Part (a) of the Code states: 'I must act with respect for people's rights to freedom of expression, self-determination and decision-making in accordance with applicable laws and conventions.'

- *Look at some of the case studies in the code of conduct for aged care that cover part (a) and/or think about how staff in your service can demonstrate meeting the Code.*

Links to additional resources

Dignity of Risk Storyboard – Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission:

<https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/resources/aged-care-quality-standards-storyboards-and-user-guide>

Code of Conduct for Aged Care, information for workers – Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission: <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/code-conduct-aged-care-information-workers>