



How staff should engage with Nearest Relatives

This tool helps staff in the mental health system to think through how to engage with Nearest Relatives.



Who is the Nearest Relative?

You may already be familiar with the role of the Nearest Relative however not all staff are. Nearest Relatives are an **important safeguard** for people who are affected by the Mental Health Act. You can use the Leaflet for staff about the Nearest Relative on the website, to find out more about the role.

How to engage with the Nearest Relative

Nearest Relatives have shared some important tips for how to engage with them.

Value the Nearest Relative

Nearest Relatives can make an enormous difference to the outcomes of patients. They have specific roles and responsibilities that will help things to work well. They often know the patient best and can give you vital information. Involve them as much as you can.

Recognise the impact of the role

There is a huge impact on Nearest Relatives from the role. Recognise that they are likely to be struggling and experiencing strong emotions. Be careful to avoid things that could make them feel unsafe, for example judgment or blaming. Consider how your words or actions could unintentionally impact on someone who has experienced trauma or harm in the past.

Be human

Nearest Relatives say that engagement should be done with humanity. There is a lot of power in the mental health system, and it can feel alien. You can be the human face and help the Nearest Relative relate to and understand what is happening.

Communicate carefully

Ask Nearest Relatives what would help you to engage with them, for example, picking the right time for a conversation. Keep them updated about what is happening and don't overpromise. Explain things as clearly as possible and consider the best way of communicating, given the Nearest Relative's culture, language, beliefs, and identity. Use inclusive, compassionate language.

Manage confidentiality

Nearest Relatives have a particular role and rights that need to be balanced with the rights of the patient. Be clear about any issues with consent and confidentiality and make sure the Nearest Relative has control over how any information they give is shared, particularly where there are safety issues.

Meetings can be particularly stressful for Nearest Relatives. Some useful tips are:

- ✓ Have a conversation with the Nearest Relative beforehand to prepare them.
- ✓ Find out what they would like to say in the meeting.
- ✓ Offer the opportunity for them to submit something in writing beforehand.
- ✓ Agree how any conflicting views between the Nearest Relative, patient, and anyone else will be handled.
- ✓ Introduce everyone in the meeting and try and keep the numbers to a minimum.
- ✓ Make sure the Nearest Relative has the chance to make their points.
- ✓ Check in with the Nearest Relative afterwards to ensure they are feeling okay.
- ✓ Make sure that the Nearest Relative knows what is happening as a result of the meeting.



**NEAREST
RELATIVES**

For further information and more factsheets please visit:

<https://nearestrelativeresources.bristol.ac.uk/>