

Honoring Risky Preferences: A Four-Step Guide

1

Identify & understand the person's choice

- What is the preference of concern? Gather as much detail as possible.
 - Why is this choice important to the person?
 - What is the risk to health or safety?
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2

Discuss the choice & options with the person

- Invite the person & family to discuss the choice during a care planning meeting. Also involve the direct care worker and other key staff who can help with decision-making.
 - What are the benefits to honoring the person's choice (e.g., enjoyment, reduced anxiety or depression, a sense of wellbeing and respect).
 - What are the possible risks to honoring the preference?
 - Repeat Step 2 with alternate options and discuss safeguards that might reduce risk for each.
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3

Develop a plan to honor the choice

- Of all the options considered, is one acceptable to the person, family and staff? Which option?
 - If no option is acceptable to all, what is the reason for the choice? And what is/are the consequences or actions that will be taken?
 - What steps will be taken to assure the person and the care team follow the agreed-upon option?
 - Once everyone is satisfied with the decision, record it in the person's care plan, with goals, action steps and risks.
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4

Carry out the plan & follow up

- Decide how often the team will formally review the plan & who will have the main responsibility for monitoring.
- Along with a formal assessment, monitor informally by asking the person how well they think the plan is going. Talk with direct care workers and other staff about their observations. Is the plan going well? Does the person seem more engaged and content? Are there any negative effects?
- Was another option considered to be the "next best step" that could be put into action, if needed?

Honoring Risky Preferences: An Example

1. Identify and understand the person's choice

Enjoying a large bowl of ice cream every night is a top preference for Mr. Smith. Before moving into the community, this was part of his nightly routine and a source of comfort. Staff hesitate to honor this preference because of Mr. Smith's diabetes and dietary restrictions.

2. Discuss the choice & options with the person

During a care planning meeting, the team discusses this preference with Mr. Smith and his daughter. The team invited the nutritionist and direct care worker to join in and help advise during decision making.

The team talks about the benefits of honoring the choice. For Mr. Smith, ice cream sparks joy and makes life feel familiar. Mr. Smith also is likely to feel that staff respect him and his choices, leading to more trusting relationships and possibly fewer barriers to care.

Next, the team considers the risks. Having ice cream every night might lead to a spike in Mr. Smith's blood levels and possible weight gain.

3. Develop a plan to honor the choice

After discussing several options and safeguards, Mr. Smith, his daughter, and the care team agree that providing sugar-free, reduced-calorie ice cream is a good way to honor Mr. Smith's preference. Every night at 8, a CNA will bring ice cream to Mr. Smith in his room before he gets ready for bed. The CNA will spend a focused 15 minutes talking with him as he eats his ice cream. This solution reduces physical health risks and enhances the emotional benefits of happiness and connection. Sadly, during COVID, the CNA cannot eat ice cream with Mr. Smith, but post-pandemic, this could change and be a routine relationship builder.

The team records the decision in Mr. Smith's care plan to ensure all staff are aware of the arrangement. Also, staff write Mr. Smith's name on his special ice cream containers so floating staff know what to serve if he requests his nightly treat.

4. Carry out the plan & follow up

With the new plan in motion, the team agrees to meet once per month to review the progress and outcomes. They decide that social worker Vicki Jones will take the lead in monitoring.

Along with formal monitoring, Vicki is sure to check in with Mr. Smith to ask for his opinions on the new plan. Vicki also asks the direct care staff and others involved in Mr. Smith's care for updates. Staff report that Mr. Smith seems less irritable and generally more cheerful since the new plan was implemented. They do, however, recommend keeping a close watch on Mr. Smith's blood sugar levels and weight, and plan to reassess as well as discuss other options if they see significant changes.