

# Striking a Balance: Halloween Decorations in Care Homes – Fun or Frightful?

The arrival of the Halloween season invariably brings excitement and anticipation. As we visit and support care communities we have seen how decorations can either be fun and entertaining, but also if we are not careful, how they have been interpreted as quite frightening. With Halloween becoming 'bigger' every year in the UK than what it has ever been before, we have sometimes questioned whether decorations and events are suitable for care home settings, especially for people living with Dementia.

Halloween decorations, when done right, can foster a sense of community and joy among residents and staff. However, in the context of care homes, Halloween decorations require careful consideration to ensure they do not inadvertently cause distress. So if you are thinking about creating a spooky environment!...how can we make Halloween enjoyable whilst maintaining sensitivity?

## Embracing the Joys of Halloween Decorations

Halloween decorations, when thoughtfully executed, can elevate the atmosphere in care homes. They serve as a catalyst for bonding, encouraging residents and staff to engage in decorating activities and share stories of past Halloweens. This creative outlet has a therapeutic effect and fosters a sense of togetherness that can be invaluable in care settings.

## Navigating the Challenges

However, the presence of Halloween decorations can pose challenges for residents, especially for those individuals living with dementia, and those that may have eyesight or sensory difficulties. The unfamiliar and potentially eerie aspects of Halloween may induce confusion or anxiety. Residents may struggle to understand the purpose of these decorations, leading to misinterpretations.

## Strategies for a Respectful Celebration

To ensure a Halloween celebration that is both enjoyable and respectful in care homes, here are some strategies that we have learnt from our experience:

1. **Consent:** Ask those living there what they would like to see in the home! Do they want any decorations? If so, what would they like? Sounds simple! but many times

those that live in the care community are not asked what they would like in their own home!

2. **Opt for Familiarity:** Employ decorations that evoke positive memories or associations, such as pumpkins or friendly ghosts, over more frightening elements.
3. **Resident Engagement:** Encourage residents' active involvement in the decorating process. Their input in choosing decorations or participation in crafting activities can enhance a sense of ownership and empowerment.
4. **Tone Down Lighting:** Avoid harsh or strobe lighting, which can be disorienting. Soft, ambient lighting contributes to a more soothing environment. Try not to cause shadows which may be misinterpreted.
5. **Clear Communication:** Staff should engage in open and transparent communication with residents regarding the upcoming Halloween celebration. Explaining the purpose of the decorations and planned activities can reduce confusion.
6. **Tailored Approach:** Recognise the uniqueness of each resident. While some may like the festivities, others may prefer a quieter environment with fewer decorations. Customising the experience to align with individual preferences is crucial.
7. **Sensory Considerations:** Incorporate sensory-friendly decorations, such as soft textures or scents, to engage multiple senses and provide a comforting experience. Loud screams when you open a door from hanging witches may not be the sensory experience that anyone would wish for!

In conclusion, balancing enjoyment and sensitivity during Halloween celebrations in care homes and communities creates a thoughtful and person-centred approach. Halloween decorations can bring joy but if we are not careful we can create distress, especially individuals living with dementia, eyesight and sensory difficulties. By emphasising familiarity, involving residents in decision-making, and respecting individual preferences, care homes can create Halloween celebrations that promote inclusivity and happiness during this festive season while upholding the dignity and comfort of their residents. Without sounding like a Halloween Scrooge..... just remember that Halloween may not be for everyone!

