

Developing the core skills of your workers: a practical guide for managers



Contents

If you're a social care manager, team leader or supervisor, this practical guide will help you develop the core skills of your workers.

Click on the headings below to get started.

Where do I start?

Embedding core skills in your workplace culture

It's important to embed core skills in your workplace culture. Start by getting everyone on board so that learning and development is viewed as part of the organisations culture and something that everyone is involved in and supports – not just something that applies to a few who have been identified as needing some support.

Start at the top with your leaders, including CEO, team leaders and other senior colleagues.

Make the business case for addressing core skills gaps and the potential cost of not doing so.

- Think of examples of how strong core skills could have a positive impact in your workplace such as reduced mistakes, improved care plans, good customer reviews and good CQC inspection reports. Chapter two of 'What are core skills and why do they matter' will help you with this.
- Consider ways of overcoming potential barriers such as time or cost, by exploring what free resources are out there to help and how core skills can be built in to other essential learning and development activities. Our website has lots of resources to help.
- Assessing core skills through the Care Certificate will help you assess core skills as part of staff induction. You can download it from www.skillsforcare.org.uk/coreskillsCareCert.

Help staff understand how they're expected to apply core skills

The more clearly staff understand how they're expected to apply core skills, the more likely they are to apply the skills in their daily work.

- Outline the benefits of staff developing their own core skills, such as increased confidence, improved skills and a better outcome for the people they're supporting.
- Give staff practical guidance so they're clear what they need to do. This could include written safe systems, task specifications, how to guides and examples of good practice. An example would be a 'top tips' document to support workers to fill in care plans; it could include what language to use, the spelling of common words or phrases and examples of good and badly written care plans.

Getting started

Once you have convinced others in your organisation of the case for improving core skills you can start thinking about the practical steps to get started.

This guide is split up into practical sections.

1. Identify the need: what core skills are needed for the roles in your organisation?
2. Where are the gaps: assessing the core skills of your staff
3. Bridge the gap: supporting staff with their core skills development
4. Keeping on track

1

Identify the need

What core skills are needed for the roles in your organisation?

Start by identifying the core skills required by the roles in your organisation.

Section 4 of 'What are core skills and why do they matter' can help you understand what level of core skills are needed for different job roles.

To help you identify what skills are needed for a job role, complete a job and task analysis.

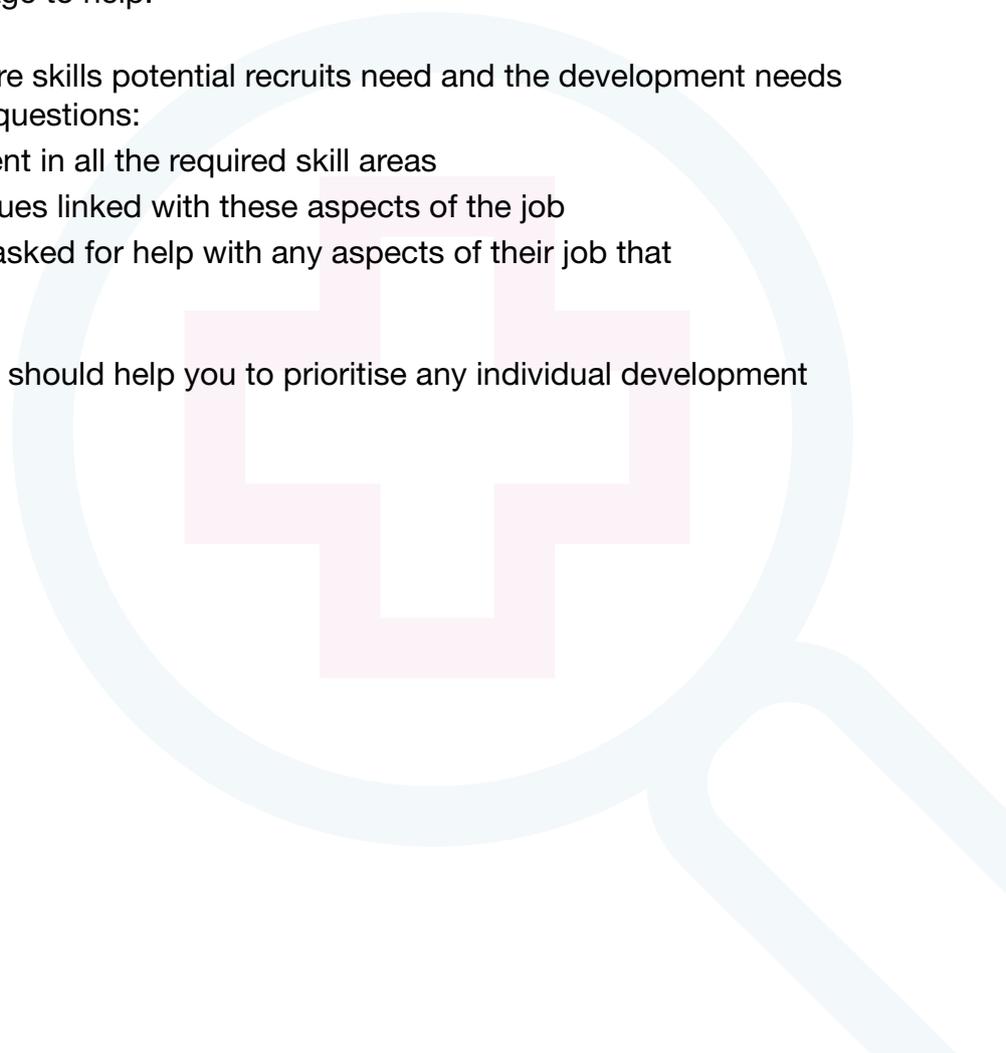
1. Review the job description or person specification for a role
2. Review the day to day requirements of the role, such as adhering to health & safety policies, writing reports or care plan notes, completing documentation, communication with family or other external agencies.

Think about:

- what are the critical tasks and activities
- what problems typically arise
- what is the difference between doing the job well and doing it badly?

3. Take each task in turn and decide what core skills are needed to complete it. Use the template on the next page to help.
4. Use this to identify what core skills potential recruits need and the development needs of existing staff. Ask these questions:
 - is each worker competent in all the required skill areas
 - are there any quality issues linked with these aspects of the job
 - have any workers ever asked for help with any aspects of their job that require these skills?

The answers to these questions should help you to prioritise any individual development needs.



Task analysis template

Day to day task	Core skills needed to complete this task
Example: Provide person-centred care	Good communication skills, including listening and talking
Example: Write care plans	Writing and reading skills, the ability to understand information and follow policies and procedures

2

Where are the gaps?

Assess the core skills of your staff

Take the right approach to assessment and keep it positive

Assessing core skills should be done sensitively and in a positive manner. Don't use a 'deficit' approach that uses phrases such as 'lack competence', 'below standard' or 'don't measure up'. This can make people feel threatened, insecure or lack in self confidence.

Highlight that good core skills will benefit your staff and the organisation. There is a list of benefits to the organisation in section 2 of 'What are core skills and why do they matter'. Here are some of the benefits of developing core skills from a staff perspective.

By developing themselves they will:

- gain more skills
- improve their work prospects
- grow in confidence (both in and out of the workplace)
- have a sense of achievement.

Most importantly, good core skills benefit people who need care and support.

Assessing core skills

Assessing core skills can be done at initial recruitment, interview, induction, appraisal or when introducing new ways of working or new equipment.

You don't need to be an expert to carry out simple assessment and Skills for Care has developed checklists to help managers and supervisors assess the core skills of staff.

They include pointers to look out for when assessing core skills and can be downloaded from www.skillsforcare.org.uk/coreskills

- Managers assessment: English skills (see appendix two)
www.skillsforcare.org.uk/assessingEnglish
- Managers assessment: number skills (see appendix three)
www.skillsforcare.org.uk/assessingnumbers
- Managers assessment: digital skills (see appendix four)
www.skillsforcare.org.uk/assessingdigital

Recruitment stage

- Check for core skills on application forms, letters and CV's. Look out for:
 - spelling errors on simple words
 - poorly formed or unreadable handwriting
 - omissions or incomplete information on application forms
 - inaccuracies in dates or figures
 - poor sentence structure or composition.
- Include core skills in job descriptions and person specifications and ask for candidates to demonstrate them.

Interview stage

- Check for core skills during the interview. Look out for:
 - misunderstanding of questions
 - vague responses to questions
 - incorrect use of words or language
 - reluctance to write.
- Ask potential recruits to complete learning activities to demonstrate their core skills. Skills for Care has produced a range of paper-based activities that can be found at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/coreskills.

Induction stage

If you identify any skills gaps at the interview stage, discuss them in induction in the context of work related duties and how these skills gaps might be addressed.

- Discuss current core skills levels of new staff. Develop an action plan that highlights any areas for development.
- Use Skills for Care learning activities to assess and develop the core skills of workers.
- Staff can develop their core skills using resources and online learning. You could also use our Learning through Work booklets to develop the knowledge elements of English and number skills.
- If new staff complete the Care Certificate as part of their induction, you can use it to assess their core skills. See appendix one or download our guide from www.skillsforcare.org.uk/coreskillsCareCert.

Supervision and appraisal stage

Supervision or appraisals are an excellent opportunity to discuss core skills with staff.

- Use supervisions and appraisals to reinforce the importance of core skills.
- Use them to encourage staff to assess themselves using our learning activities.
- If core skills gaps are identified, implement an action plan to help staff develop.
- Use further meetings to assess development and further learning needs.
- When you introduce new ways of working or equipment – changes in the workplace can be an excellent opportunity to assess core skills.
- Review the core skills required to work in the new way or use a new piece of equipment.
- Undertake a screening or assessment exercise with everyone who is affected- this will highlight any core skills gaps that may prevent an individual for being able to fully engage in new processes or procedures.
- Implement any learning and development to ensure all staff have the right skills.

3

Bridge the gap

Support your staff with their core skills development

Learning and development can be done in different ways depending on how staff prefer to learn.

The more flexibility you can offer staff in how they develop their core skills, the more likely it is they will find an option that suits them and engage in their personal development. People have different personal circumstances and different learning styles and preferences – try to make a variety of options available to maximise the take up of core skills development.

Section 3 of ‘What are core skills and why do they matter’ will help you understand how people learn. Here are some more useful tips.

- Set up an on-site learning room where individuals can access a variety of resources and learning activities during breaks, between shifts or at agreed self-development times.
- Use an independent training provider or college to provide work based training or training at their premises. Use our Choosing workforce learning guide to help you find a training provider that meets your needs. Download it from www.skillsforcare.org.uk/CWF.
Many training providers will design bespoke training so you can input into the planning of the training and specify what outcomes you would like to see.
- Self directed learning can suit more motivated individuals who are happy to access learning and development independently through computers at home or at work or by using printed resources or videos. Our website has lots of links and resources to core skills learning.
- Embed core skills development in other training. The Care Certificate, qualifications and other training such as health and safety, effective communication and First Aid can provide opportunities to develop core skills. If you’re working with an external training provider, speak to them about embedding core skills development in to the programme.



- Embed core skills in quality initiatives such as The Social Care Commitment or *I Care...Ambassadors*. They provide an ideal opportunity to involve staff and assess core skills.

For example The Social Care Commitment is structured around tasks that require staff to reflect on how to put values into practice. *I Care...Ambassadors* involves staff delivering activities to people interested in working in social care. Both initiatives provide opportunities to assess core skills such as communication, writing, presentation, team work and digital skills.

- Develop core skills coaches, mentors or champions Identify individuals who have strong core skills who can support others to develop their skills in the workplace during day-to-day work or one to one sessions. You will need to invest some time in the development of the coach, mentor or champion, but in the long term this could be a cost effective way of developing core skills.

4

Keeping on track

It's important to monitor and evaluate your core skills development strategy to measure the effectiveness and return on investment of the development opportunities you are providing.

Look out for signs that things aren't going according to plan.

- Staff not turning up for training or mentoring sessions.
- Little or no improvement in the work tasks that were identified.
- External training providers are not meeting your needs/expectations.
- Managers/supervisors are not supporting the program.

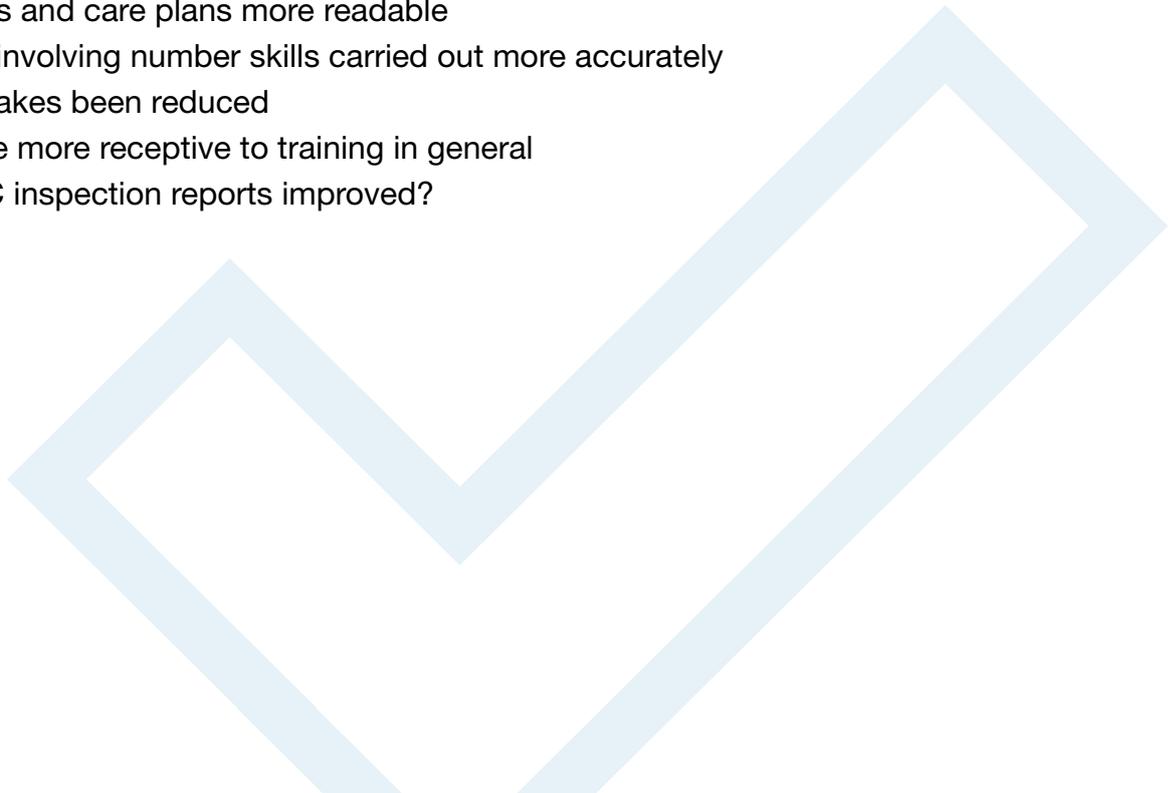
Look at the short term and long term benefits of your core skills learning and development.

This could include things such as increased motivation, improved morale and better staff performance. You can do this by:

- formal evaluations such as questionnaires or surveys following training
- speaking to staff for feedback or suggestions to keep the core skills agenda 'live'.
- monitoring development through supervisions or appraisals – make sure staff feel comfortable discussing any skills gaps and confident their manager will support them to address these
- celebrating and sharing successes to let people know core skills really do matter.

Also look at specifics such as:

- have spoken communication skills improved
- is recording and monitoring being completed more accurately
- are reports and care plans more readable
- are tasks involving number skills carried out more accurately
- have mistakes been reduced
- are people more receptive to training in general
- have CQC inspection reports improved?



Appendix one

Assessing core skills as part of the Care Certificate

Core skills are the crucial functional and employability skills needed to work in social care. They include English, number, digital, team work and problem solving skills.

Having the right core skills will mean workers can provide high quality care and support, complete qualifications and training, and meet sector standards including CQC requirements and the Social Care Commitment.

If you have workers completing the Care Certificate workbook, this is also a great opportunity to assess their core skills.

How to assess core skills

As the worker is completing the Care Certificate workbook, there are some key things you should look out for.

These documents outline the elements that make up a particular skill, and show what an employer should look out for.

- Assessing English skills (appendix two)
- Assessing number skills (appendix three)
- Assessing digital skills (appendix four)

Assessing and developing core skills

If you notice any potential gaps in your workers core skills, we have lots of resources to help you.

Our core skills activities can be used to assess core skills. They focus on English, number and digital skills. You could use them as a stand alone exercise or as part of supervision and appraisal to identify gaps before discussing them with an employee.

Once core skills gaps have been identified and discussed, we have a range of resources to help your employee develop their core skills. The bitesized learning resources are free to download from the website. Our Learning through Work booklets are available to order from the Skills for Care bookshop.

Download free resources from www.skillsforcare.org.uk/coreskills.

All our learning materials have been designed specifically to relate to the adult social care workplace.

Appendix two

Assessing English skills

The core skills learning activities give you a good picture of the person's English skills including:

- reading
- writing
- speaking
- listening.

They also give you an indication of the person's attention to detail and ability to think through a problem.

Discuss the answers the learner has written on their core skills activity sheet.

Reading skills		
The learner ...	Yes	No
Is able to read and understand the task		
Shows an understanding of key words and concepts		
Writing skills		
The learner ...	Yes	No
Has clear and legible handwriting		
Writes all information correctly		
Writes information that is relevant to the task		
Writes in a way that is easy to follow and in logical sequence		
Uses accurate spelling		
Uses accurate punctuation (e.g. commas, full stops, apostrophes)		

Uses the right words in the right ways (vocabulary)		
Uses standard English appropriately (grammar)		
Uses a range of expressions rather than writing simply and repeating the same expressions		
Speaking skills		
The learner ...	Yes	No
Expresses ideas confidently and clearly		
Spoke in a way that is easy to understand		
Found the words they wanted to use and explained them		
Spoke at a normal pace, with few pauses, repetition or self correction		
Other		
Completed the task within the time allocated (ability to write quickly)		
Does their level of English skills meet your requirements?		
If there is a skills gap, is this something you can develop with training?		

Appendix three

Assessing number skills

The core skills activities give you an indication of the person's maths-related knowledge and skills, including:

- addition and subtraction
- multiplication
- date marks and calendars
- calculating time
- filling in charts.

They also give you an indication of the person's attention to detail and ability to think through a problem, as well as their reading and writing skills.

Discuss the answers the learner has written on their core skills activity sheet.

Number skills		
The learner ...	Yes	No
Can solve typical care problems effectively.		
Can communicate effectively about typical care problems.		
Understood the questions (knowledge of key words, symbols and concepts).		
Used number skills and knowledge to solve the problems; did not guess the answers (knowledge of how to solve problems).		
Gave the correct answer (ability to make accurate calculations).		
Wrote calculations and answers clearly (legibility).		
Completed the activity within the allocated time (ability to problem solve quickly).		
Explained their answers clearly and coherently afterwards.		
Other		
Does their level of number skills meet your requirements?		
If there is a skills gap, is this something you can develop with training?		

Appendix four

Assessing digital skills

The core skills activities give you an indication of the person's digital skills and knowledge, including:

- word processing
- using the internet
- using digital technologies.

They also give you an indication of the person's attention to detail and ability to think through a problem, as well as their reading and writing skills.

Discuss the answers the learner has written on their core skills activity sheet.

Digital skills			
The learner ...	Yes	No	N/A
Understood the task and what was being asked from them			
Was able to use the computer confidently			
Was able to log on to the internet and find the information needed			
Knew where to find the information or tools they needed to complete the task (for example could open Microsoft Word on the computer)			
Used information from a range of media including video, podcast, web pages and documents			
Completed the task in the allocated time			
Completed the task correctly			
Other			
Does their level of digital skills meet your requirements?			
If there is a skills gap, is this something you can develop with training?			

Core skills activities

These core skills activities help you decide whether the person has the core skills they need to work safely and meet quality standards.

They include English, number, digital and employability skills.

How long do they take?

About 10-15 minutes to complete and then time to review and assess.

How can I use the core skills activities?

The activities can be used in a number of different situations.

- Recruitment: you could use them as part of your recruitment process to assess an individual's core skills.
- Induction, supervision & appraisal: you could use them as part of an individual's learning needs analysis, and ongoing development. There are also lots of Skills for Care's resources to help you address any skills gaps.
- Ongoing learning: there is also a series of learning activities to further develop core skills. These relate to key aspects of the job and address core skills including team work, following policies and procedures and managing relationships at work.

How do they work?

The learner is given a scenario and is asked to answer related questions or tasks based on the scenario, to assess particular core skills.

The manager/ assessor will then go through the task with the learner and assess their core skills.

What skills checks are available?

English skills

- Confidentiality in social care
- Safeguarding in social care
- Writing social care plans
- Discussing and reporting incidents

Number skills

- Filling in charts
- Counting medication
- Completing time sheets

Digital skills

- Planning a trip out using the internet
- Using a word document
- How often do you use digital technology at work and outside of work?

Other learning activities

We've also developed a set of additional learning activities to help you assess and develop core skills further.

These require learners to reflect on their own experiences so would be better suited to someone already in the role.

They address employability skills such as team work, understanding policies and procedures and problem solving, as well as English and communication skills.

- Dealing with an unreliable colleague
- Dealing with complaints
- Dealing with conflicts with colleagues
- Discussing partnership working in a team meeting
- Partnership working in social care
- Managing your own health and wellbeing
- Understanding abuse and neglect
- Understanding agreed ways of working
- Understanding values in social care

Example core skills activity one

English skills: writing social care plans

This activity will assess the learner's reading and writing skills.

Managers/assessors: use the assessment sheet to evaluate the learner's core skills. It gives you lots of hints and tips of what to look out for when assessing core skills.

Activity

Think about your own morning routine. If you weren't able to do this yourself and someone was going to help you to get ready on a morning, what would your care plan say?

Fill in the sections below to help your care worker support you to get ready. Remember to include any personal preferences for example you like the radio on whilst you are getting ready.

I need ... support with personal care

I want my care worker to ...

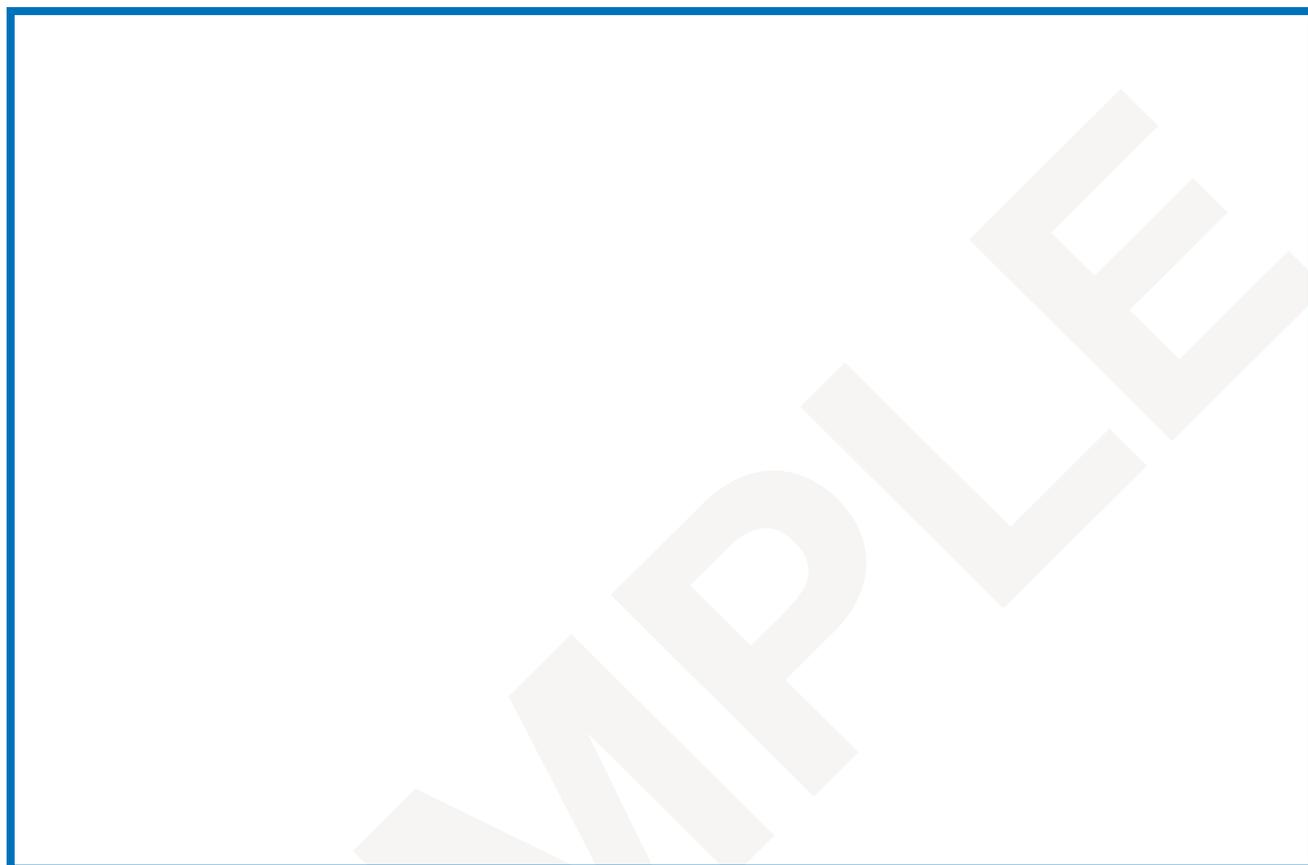
Example: Run me some hot water in the sink and leave a flannel on the side. I don't like lots of bubbles in the water so I will put the soap on the flannel myself.

A large empty rectangular box with a blue border, intended for the learner to write their care plan. A large, light grey watermark reading 'SAMPLE' is diagonally overlaid across the page, including this box.

I need... support with my breakfast

I want my care worker to ...

Example: I like a cup of tea with my breakfast, with milk and 1 sugar.



A large empty rectangular box with a blue border, intended for writing a response. The box is currently blank, except for a faint, diagonal watermark that reads "SAMPLE".

Example core skills activity two

Number skills: filling in charts

This activity will assess the learner's number skills and their ability to fill in charts.

Managers/assessors: use the number and English skills assessment sheet to evaluate the learner's core skills. It gives you lots of hints and tips of what to look out for when assessing core skills.

Activity

In care work, you may be required to fill in charts to help you keep accurate records. Read the scenarios below and answer the questions by filling in the charts.

Filling in a financial transition record

Mark has £45 in his account.

- He puts £150 into his account on 1 May.
- On 3 May he spends £5 on a taxi and £15.50 on lunch.
- On 15 May his care and support staff take £10 to buy some toiletries and bring back £2.50 change.
- On 20 May he spends £10 on a bus pass and £17.50 on cinema tickets.

Write the above purchases into the chart below, and write how much money Mark has left at the end of the month.

Each purchase needs to be on a separate line. The first one has been done for you.

Date	Money received	Receipt for purchase	Balance
£45 balance brought forward from April			
01/05/2016	£150	n/a	£195
03/05/2016	n/a	£5 taxi	£190

Filling in a fluid balance chart

Margaret has had an illness and the nurse has asked you to monitor her fluid input and output whilst on your morning shift.

Fill in the chart below based on the below scenarios. The first few have been done for you.

- At 7.30am Margaret goes to the toilet and passed 150ml of urine.
- At 8am Margaret has a 250ml cup of tea and 100ml of water.
- At 10.15am she has 200ml of water.
- At 11am she has 20ml of tea.
- At 11.15am she goes to the toilet and passes 200ml of urine.
- At 12am she has 100ml of water.
- At 12.30am she has 200ml of tea.

Time	Fluid intake (mls)		Fluid output (mls)			
	Oral/ type	Total	Urine	Vomit	Other	Total
7.30am			150ml			150ml
8am	250ml tea	250ml				
8am	100ml water	350ml				

Total fluid intake

Total fluid outputs

Example core skills activity three

Digital skills: planning a trip out using the internet

This activity will assess the learner's skills and knowledge of using the internet to find information.

Managers/assessors: use the digital and English skills assessment sheet to evaluate the learner's core skills. It gives you lots of hints and tips of what to look out for when assessing core skills.

Activity

You have been asked to plan a trip out for five individuals you support. You will need to conduct online research to do this.

Complete the following tasks and fill in the information below. You should base this task relevant to the individuals you support for example individuals in wheelchairs, individuals with dementia or individuals with a mental health condition. Your manager might provide more details about this.

1. Do an online search to find suggestions for trips out locally. This could be using a search engine such as Google or Bing. Write your notes below.
2. Decide which trip you would like to organise.

You now might want to find out more information online about the following points. If relevant, do some online research and write your notes below.

3. If you are going to an actual place, for example a museum or café, what are the opening times?
4. What transport will you need for your trip out? You may want to look at local public transport, taxi firms, mini bus hire. You will need to think about any access issues, for example wheelchair access, and costs.

5. How long will it take to get to your chosen place? You might want to use Google Maps or another online tool to calculate how long it will take either walking, by car or by public transport.

6. Is your trip out accessible for the individuals you are taking? You may want to research whether there is a disabled ramp or if there are stairs, disabled facilities such as a toilet, and regular spaces to sit down.

SAMPLE

Example core skills activity four

Managing your own health and wellbeing

How to use this activity

1. Ask the person to read the information about resilience, stress and pressure.
2. Ask them to think about their own health and wellbeing and complete the activities.
3. Discuss any issues with the person and decide any actions needed.

Activity

The daily stressfulness of care work can contribute to

- errors and misjudgements
- low morale
- sickness absence
- burnout
- staff turnover in the sector.

It is therefore very important that all social care workers manage their own health and well-being. Being resilient at work can help you to do this.

Simply put, resilience is the ability to cope under pressure and with stress. Here are some of the characteristics of a resilient person

- a sense of purpose
- self awareness
- confidence in their own abilities
- grows and develops
- takes a positive outlook on things.

It is important that you understand how resilient you are and how you cope with stress and pressure. This will help you to manage your own health and wellbeing.

Here are a few activities to help you understand more about your health and wellbeing.

Activity one: What can make care work stressful?

Think about some of the things that can make care work stressful.

Activity two: How are you coping at the moment?

Self-assessment test

At work in the last month, how often you felt...	Never	Almost never	Some-times	Fairly often	Very often
1. Upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	0	1	2	3	4
2. Unable to control important things in your job?	0	1	2	3	4
3. Nervous and 'stressed'?	0	1	2	3	4
4. Unsure about your ability to handle problems in your job?	0	1	2	3	4
5. Things are not going your way?	0	1	2	3	4
6. You can't cope with all the things that you have to do?	0	1	2	3	4
7. Unable to control irritations in your job?	0	1	2	3	4
8. You aren't on top of things?	0	1	2	3	4
9. Angry because of things that are outside your control?	0	1	2	3	4
10. Difficulties are piling up so high that you can't overcome them?	0	1	2	3	4
Add up your scores in each column					
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total

Interpret your score

0-10 You feel able to cope with pressure at work – you may be practising resilient behaviours already

11-14 You are coping with pressure at work most, but not all, of the time – start developing your resilience now

15-18 You are only coping with pressure at work some of the time – this may be affecting your judgement, behaviour and relationships at work; over time, feeling like this may start to affect your health

19+ You feel overwhelmed by pressure at work – feeling like this will affect your judgement, behaviour and relationships at work; it is likely to damage your health

Further guidance

'Building your own resilience, health and wellbeing' has lots more tips and activities to help you understand and develop your resilience. Download it from www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resilience

If you are worried about your health, see a doctor. This questionnaire is not a professional diagnosis.

*Adapted from the Perceived Stress Scale developed by Dr Sheldon Cohen, Carnegie Mellon University