



# KEEPING FAMILIES IN THE LOOP:

Bridging Conversations through  
Mindful Communication with  
Families

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April 2020

## INTRODUCTION

Families spend countless hours visiting loved ones who reside in LTC Homes and are entrusted to your care. Their on-going presence plays an important role in providing support to front-line staff. The Ontario Government (March 14th, 2020) implemented policy and temporary procedural changes in response to COVID-19 to protect the safety of residents and staff, triggering anxiety and stress for families. Daily media updates only add to the growing sense of anxiety and stress.

Limited communication between LTC homes and families wishing to inquire about the health and care of their loved ones during this time have resulted in frustration and feelings of despair and being left in the dark.



While the current approach for communication with families varies from home to home, this is a growing need to provide a more consistent framework to have these important conversations and updates.

This booklet provides some examples for LTC Homes to employ when conveying details about the effects of COVID-19, the policies and procedures in place and overall desired communication strategies when speaking with families.

We encourage you to use the recently released tool "*Quick 10 COVID 19 Long-Term Care Home Update Checklist*" ([www.fco.ngo/Quick10](http://www.fco.ngo/Quick10)) created in partnership by Family Councils Ontario, Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario, and CanAGE to help you when interacting with families and providing the updates they seek.

## **FAMILY COUNCILS HELPING WITH COMMUNICATION**

Family Councils play an important role advocating on behalf of the residents to improve their quality of life in Long-term Care Homes. Staff and administrators have already spent time working to build a relationship with Family Councils. During COVID-19, administrators can use this existing relationship to guide their decisions for communication with families.

Staff can reach out to Council leaders to bridge communication with families, requesting Chairs (or other leaders) to collect family concerns and relay information to families.

Family Councils have existing mail lists, newsletters and other means to share information with family members.



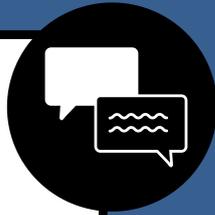
## **BENEFITS OF COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

Communication is essential during this crisis. We recognize the growing stress and the strains placed on resources within your home. This new booklet will provide Long-term Care Homes with a quick and consistent approach for relaying information and communicating with families to ensure they are provided with details regarding their loved ones. As families are unable to enter the home, efforts to provide on-going communication demonstrates the homes commitment to supporting and reassuring families and facilitates transparency regarding the decisions that have been made to address the needs of residents.

# Tips for Communication with Families

## GET INPUT ON THE METHOD(S) OF COMMUNICATION

Ask families about their preferred mode(s) of communication. Common methods include e-mail, websites, and "Robo" calls. Families with a loved one affected by COVID-19 should be called by staff for additional details.



## ASK WHEN TO COMMUNICATE

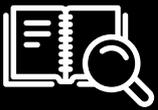
You don't want to trigger anxiety by providing too much information. Ask families how often they want updates about COVID-19 (i.e. daily, weekly).

Some homes have implemented daily automated calls or updates on their websites.



## MAKE IT EASY TO FIND UPDATES

Use your existing resources (i.e. websites, social media) to share updated with families. When using social media you can include links to direct families to information.



## MAKE IT AUTOMATED

Families appreciate the use of e-mails and automated calls to share updates about COVID-19.

Test your automated system in advance to make that all families receive the message.



## USE HEADERS

Help families find the answers they are looking to find by organizing information by topic (i.e. Virtual/Window visit program, staffing, PPE use).

Families also appreciate when homes have created COVID-19 FAQ documents.



## INDICATE WHO TO CONTACT & WHEN THE INFORMATION WAS LAST UPDATED

Some homes have a dedicated phone line for families to call for COVID-19 updates.

Homes will also share details about the who to call and when they will be available to speak to families.



# Frequent Questions Families Might Ask

## Visitor Restrictions

- When was the policy implemented (date)?
- Who made the decision? What policy supports this decision?
- How will families be notified if they qualify to be an essential visitor?
- Are third party/private companions permitted into the home?

## COVID-19 Screening of Residents & Staff

- When was active screening put in place (date)?
- What policies were used to guide this decision (i.e. Infection Control)?
- Where/how can families request a copy of this policy?
- Where and when does screening occur?
- What happens to staff/residents who demonstrate COVID-19 symptoms?
- What is the COVID-19 status of the home?
- Who has tested positive for COVID-19 (staff/resident)?
- What is the home doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19?
- Is an infection control specialist involved in advising or informing the home on pandemic management?
- What are the steps taken when a staff member demonstrates COVID-19 symptoms?
- What steps are taken when a resident demonstrates COVID-19 symptoms?

**\*\*Tip for Homes-** Consider providing families a link to the local Public Health Unit to help them find answers to some of these questions

## Social & Physical Distancing Practices

- How is social/physical distancing being implemented within the home?
- How is social/physical distancing communicated to staff/residents?
- How are residents eating their meals? Are they being served meals in their own rooms? If yes, then why? If no, then why not?
- What activities are being offered to residents to maintain their social and psychological well-being?
- Is the Social Worker, Chaplain, BSO team still involved to monitor and support residents well-being?

# Frequent Questions Families Might Ask

## Use of Personal Protective Equipment

- What personal protective equipment are staff using?
- What is the availability of personal protective equipment for staff?

## Information on Virtual/Window Visiting

- Does your home offer a virtual/window visiting program?
- Who do family members need to contact to arrange a virtual/window visit?
- Why do visits need to be scheduled?
- Is there a fee for virtual visits?
- What restrictions are in place for virtual/window visits (i.e. length of the visit, frequency)?
- What can families do if they don't know how to use technology?
- What can families do if they have a poor internet connection?
- How can families arrange for privacy during their virtual visit?
- How can families connect with their loved one in an emergency?
- What are some strategies to celebrate holidays, birthdays etc.?

## Instructions for Care Packages

- What can I include in a care package for my loved one?
- When can I drop off a care package for my loved one?
- Where can I leave the care package?
- Who do I need to contact if I want to leave a care package?

## Information on Wellness Checks

- What are clinical staff doing to provide updates to family on their loved ones?
- Who should family contact if they have questions about their loved one?
- Is there dedicated staff responsible for communication?
- When is the best time to contact staff to answer questions regarding wellness/care provided to their loved one in your home?



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Elder Abuse Prevention (ON)

Stop Abuse - Restore Respect

**CanAge** 

The "*Keeping Families In the Loop: Bridging Conversations through Mindful Communication with Families*" document was developed by Family Councils Ontario, Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario, and CanAge as part of a collaborative partnership rooted in crisis resolution. Together, we will help many!