



Creating a culture of engagement through leading effective conversations

Establishing a long-term care culture of engagement can help care home leaders in their continuous quality improvement strategy.

Engagement with resident and family councils is crucial in long-term care as it amplifies resident voices, fosters open communication, and improves the overall quality of care.

By actively listening to residents and families, leadership can better understand needs, address concerns, and make decisions that enhance the living experience.

This, in turn, leads to improved resident outcomes, greater staff job satisfaction, and a more positive care environment.

[The Independent Long-Term Care Councils Association of BC](#) (ILTCCABC) believes that how resident and family councils approach their conversations with leadership can make or break the trajectory of the outcomes.

How do we, as councils, influence a culture of engagement (input and feedback)?

In our other document resources, we advise on the importance of building relationships between families and the care team, between the family council and the management and between our residents and our care home community and its councils. We cannot begin to have a conversation about making changes or opportunities for improvement until we have cultivated some sort of trusting relationship based on interactions that are respectful, considerate, accurate and transparent.

How can we contribute to positive changes for our long-term care community residents and their families?

Family Councils must focus on their common ground with the care team: enhancing residents' quality of care and quality of life and supporting their families through active participation, open communication, and person-centered care. This involves prioritizing residents' preferences, promoting social connections, and ensuring families are well-informed and involved in care decisions.



Did you know how we show up makes a difference?

Here's a breakdown of tips to enhance your conversational presence:

1. Be Present and Engaged:

Minimize distractions: Put away your phone and make eye contact.

Be mindful of your body language: Maintain an open posture and lean in slightly to show engagement. Lose the emotion. To reduce the emotional intensity in a conversation, try actively listening, taking pauses, and reframing negative thoughts. Focusing on the facts, practicing deep breathing, and visualizing calm scenarios can also help. Remember that you can't always control your emotional reactions, but you can choose how to respond.

2. Ask Thoughtful Questions:

Use open-ended questions: Ask "how" or "what" questions to encourage them to elaborate.

Don't interrupt: Let the other person finish their thought before responding.

Ask clarifying questions: If something is unclear, ask for more details.

3. Be Empathetic and Respectful:

Acknowledge different perspectives: Show that you understand their point of view.

Be patient: Avoid interruption and allow them to express themselves fully.

Validate their feelings as they should do yours: Acknowledge their emotions, even if you do not fully understand them.

4. Be Genuine but also aware of your words and tone:

Be yourself: Don't try to be someone you are not.

Share your own thoughts and feelings authentically: This helps build trust and rapport.

Be direct but not blaming and complaining with no recommendations: Focus on one issue at a time, focus on the facts and what is actually happening and what needs to be addressed

5. Create a Positive Atmosphere:

Smile and be friendly: You want to be able to have ongoing conversations after this one is over.

Find common ground: The obvious is resident care and their life.

Offer genuine compliments: Positive feedback can boost the conversation, especially at the beginning, to set the stage that "it's not all bad".

A key to building trust and developing a relational approach/culture in long-term care is building trust and a relational approach. In long-term care family councils, effective communication and fostering strong relationships between residents, families, and staff are key. This includes staff actively listening to residents and families, understanding their needs and preferences, and involving them in care planning and decision-making. Building trust also requires the reciprocal sharing of information, mutual respect, and a willingness to learn from each other.



How can family councils navigate difficult conversations more effectively?

1. Don't avoid or delay bringing forward collective issues that are not supporting residents in a safe, caring or consistent way. Putting off conversations only allows the issue to grow. Councils can act as a barometer of how things are going.
2. Set the expectations for inviting feedback and input. Demonstrate how useful it is to know what the climate is like regarding food, safety, care, consistency, support, resources and other daily activities of importance to residents. Give examples.
3. Ask questions, stay curious, not critical. The biggest mistake you can make is to think that you have all the facts. Do not prepare a speech, expecting management to accept it. It is disrespectful and ignores other people's perspectives. Reality check: You don't have a monopoly on the truth.
4. Be appreciative of any time the staff and management give you before launching into the difficult conversation. Say you are grateful to be able to provide input and feedback before you provide feedback, which may be difficult to hear.
5. Always align your conversations with what is important to the care home operator: caring for the safety and well-being of residents. Openly state this at the beginning of your meeting (like an acknowledgement) that "we are all here for the common good of our residents and the long-term care home community."

The Four Steps of Alignment Aligns with ILTCCABC's support for a Relational Approach to Long-Term Care and Appreciative Inquiry

4 D's, or discover, define, discuss and decide.

STEP 1

ASK ABOUT THE SITUATION – COME FROM A PLACE OF CURIOSITY

Start by asking questions rather than making statements.

Research shows that those who listen are 4 times more effective at handling sensitive issues.

For example, you might say:

"How do you know about the family council minutes we shared with you recently?" (which reflected an issue with a lack of consistency in getting residents ready for the day). This directs the conversation toward the issue without triggering defensiveness. It also invites the other person to share your insights or facts you might not be aware of. They might even bring up the issue you wanted to discuss.

STEP 2

SHARE YOUR OBSERVATION

Next, clearly state what you've observed. For instance, "I noticed that the care aides do not seem to be using the Point Click Care data to check what Activities of Daily Living (ADL) each resident has. It appears to families that have observed their loved ones' daily preparation, that care aides are just entering the room and providing the same task of care for each person when everyone has their specific needs."



Using phrases such as “it appears”, “it seems”, or “it comes across” signals that you’re sharing your perspective, not making a final judgment.

STEP 3 – ASK FOR CLARIFICATION.

Our perspective may not be 100% correct. Most of us don’t have all the facts about situations in which someone else is the primary actor. After stating your observations, ask the other person for their perspective to get all the facts on the table. You might say, “Are you aware of any issues that may be affecting the quality and consistency of care lately?” or “Have you noticed this pattern too?” When you ask for clarification, you take the position of factfinder, not accuser.

STEP 4 – FOCUS ON IMPROVING THE FUTURE.

When you lead with questions, you will probably gain new insights that change your view of the situation. In that case, you might say, “Thanks for clarifying. I see there is more to the situation than it appeared. What can be done to ensure all residents will be set up for the day with the ADLs that matter to them in the future?” or “Thanks for clarifying. What can we, as families, do to support you, so we can ensure residents are set up for success? No matter how the conversation unfolds, the key is to come to an agreement about what one or both of you can do differently to achieve a better outcome.

If your family council has additions to this list, please submit them to iltccabc@gmail.com.

This is a living document, and we are happy to grow and share our knowledge as we come upon it.

