



ILTCCABC Education Session: Building a Positive Council-Operator Relationship in Long-Term Care

April 7, 2026

 [Slide Deck](#)

Key takeaways

- Building positive council-operator relationships requires trust, clear communication, and sustained commitment over time
- Family councils should shift from reactive problem-solving to proactive, solution-focused collaboration with care home operators
- Effective strategies include the Relational Triangle framework, gentle advocacy, and appreciative inquiry approaches
- Both family councils and care home operators face similar challenges, including limited time, staffing continuity issues, and communication gaps
- Reframing issues as opportunities enables constructive dialogue and shared decision-making focused on the resident's quality of life
- The next ILTCCABC education session on June 9, 2026, will address end-of-life planning and legacy matters

Discussed topics

Introduction

Lisa Dawson, President of [ILTCCABC](#) and Barbara Kirby, Advisor to Vancouver Coastal Association of Family Councils ([VCAFC](#)), Author of [70 to 100 in a Blink: Lifestyle Planning, Support, & Advocacy for seniors & their families](#) and Seniors Navigator: <https://seniorsadvocate.ca/>, co-facilitated the session.



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This topic of this information emerged from requests by family councils and care home operators seeking to improve their collaborative relationships. The session assumes participants understand the benefits of family councils and want to make legislative engagement work effectively.

What a positive relationship looks like

The presenters outlined the characteristics and requirements of positive council-operator relationships, emphasizing that it goes beyond superficial cooperation.

- Trust is foundational but takes time to build through regular meetings and consistent touchpoints
- The relationship pyramid shows trust as the base, with communication, problem-solving, and execution building upon it
- All conversations should be laser-focused on the shared goal of improving resident quality of life

Challenges facing family councils and care home operators

The presentation identified parallel challenges faced by both family councils and care home operators that interfere with effective relationships.

- Both sides face remarkably similar challenges of time, demanding caregiving workloads and turnover
- Awareness of these challenges is essential for building empathy and effective collaboration
- Family councils need grace and openness to support each other through these difficulties

Reframing problems as issues and issues = opportunities

A conceptual shift from viewing situations as problems to viewing them as issues was introduced. This results in being able to envision issues as opportunities for improvement.

- Every issue contains an opportunity for positive change
- This reframing enables proactive, solution-focused approaches rather than reactive complaint-based interactions



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- The goal is to shift from identifying what is wrong to collaboratively creating what could be better

Solutions for family councils: Building skills and understanding

The presenters introduced three proven methodologies for family councils to improve relationship-building with care home operators.

- Explained the Relational Triangle framework by Deborah Batki
Book: [What Now? Managing the Emotional Journey of Long-Term Care for families](#)
[Recipe for Empathy – six strategies to transform your families into fans!](#)
[Video 4: How Family Council can help new families joining your LTC community](#)
- [Gentle Advocacy](#)
- [Appreciative Inquiry](#) with five key questions
- These three frameworks provide practical tools for family councils to navigate challenging conversations
- Starting with appreciation and focusing on what works well creates openness to discussing improvements
- Regional and provincial associations can provide mentorship in applying these approaches

Solutions for care home operators: Embedding collaboration

Key strategies for care home operators to strengthen their relationships with family councils.

- True collaboration means involving councils before decisions are made
- Communication infrastructure must be proactive and comprehensive
- Positive relationships require daily practice of respect and shared purpose, not just aspirational goals

Welcoming new families and building family council membership

Participants discussed the ongoing challenge of welcoming new families to care homes and recruiting them to join family councils.

- **Upon admission:** Little explanation of how the facility operates, who does what, or how to navigate the system



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- Family Council suggests a **welcoming committee** would be helpful to newcomers. A barrier is the cloak of confidentiality, and accessing an introduction to newcomers to provide a welcome.
- **Ensure the Family Council pamphlet is in the admission package** and in the handbook. IDEA: a postcard featuring resident art on one side and family council contact information on the other.

[Sample 1](#)

[Sample 2](#)

[Sample 3](#)

Cards to be placed in each new resident's room

- Another suggestion: **hold quarterly get-togethers**, inviting new residents and families to ease the difficult transition and help them know others are going through the same experience
- Building family council membership is critical but challenging, with councils often dwindling as residents pass away, and the chair typically bears most of the burden of suggested activities. **Reliance on operators to assist the promotion of family councils** by encouraging staff to promote council participation to new families

Advocacy beyond the care home walls

Participants discussed the scope and limits of family council advocacy on broader systemic issues like bed shortages.

- Individual family council members can advocate as far as they feel called to go on systemic issues – attend the regional association of family council forums
- Provincial-level advocacy is happening through collaborative efforts, but local advocacy is also needed JSABC collaborative on [Healthcare Needs Home Care](#)
- The scope extends beyond family councils to include community members and families waiting for beds – can ILTCCABC connect with those waiting in the community to provide a pre-welcome and information/preparation?
- Budget constraints limit what even the Minister of Health can influence regarding cancelled care home projects

Next education session announcement: June 9, 2026

[After the End of Life: Your Life and Your Legacy](#)