

Communication with Families During the Pandemic

The extent to which nursing home visitation restrictions remain in place varies based on federal, state and local regulations and the prevalence of COVID-19 in surrounding communities. Some levels of visitation restrictions are likely to remain for some time as decision-makers strive to determine the right balance between resident safety and socialization.

The following tips for targeted and timely communication with family members and residents are based on a survey of 198 families in 21 states conducted by researchers from the Miami University Scripps Gerontology Center.

The survey identifies a correlation between effective communication, family satisfaction and whether families considered removing a resident from the facility during the pandemic-associated visitor restrictions.



- **Develop a clear management strategy** for regular communication from multiple sources.
 - As you develop your strategy and approach, consider the predominant cultures in your community
 - Establish a practice to identify family communication preferences at admission and verify at regular intervals to include telephone, email, text and other methods in use by facility.
 - Utilize mass emails, daily robocalls, and regular telephone calls to keep families informed on general facility information and COVID-19 status in the facility.
- **Review regularly** to determine what has worked effectively and what elements might need adjustment. Ask for input from residents and families.
- **Build family confidence** by communicating what is being done to prevent occurrences and/or the spread of COVID-19 in the facility and what notification will occur when staff or residents test positive.
- **Communicate anecdotes or stories** about an event or something in the resident's day to help allay family worries about loneliness and isolation or their concern that care and assistance that used to be provided by family will no longer be available.
- **Remind families that compassionate visits can be allowed** under some circumstances such as end-of-life to address family worries about residents passing away alone.
- **Provide staff with facility cell phone access** to regularly send texts or record case notes such as "Mrs. Smith loved the blueberry pie at lunch," or "Mr. Jones learned to play solitaire on the tablet today." Messages like these can go a long way towards reassuring families that things are going as well as can be expected.
- **Provide a forum for families** to ask questions and provide feedback, particularly about information they may have heard from residents or seen on the news or social media.
- **Consider closed Facebook groups or other social media platforms** as a way to share messaging with more than the resident's primary contact.

To learn more about the study findings and recommendations, visit

[The family experience in long-term care during the COVID-19 visitation restriction - Miami University](#)



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