

Supporting Staff Through a Pandemic

A toolkit for Congregate Care Settings

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Communication Tips for Healthcare Workers Supporting Personal Caregivers experiencing Grief during a pandemic – FACILITATORS GUIDE

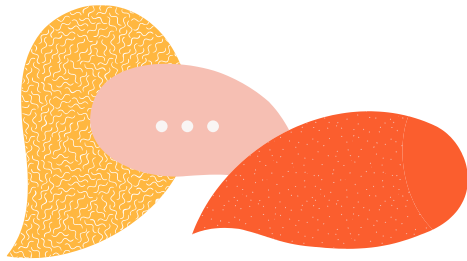


Communications tips

You do not have to be a trained therapist to care and to listen. It may be awkward, and you may not find the words right away, sometimes there are no words but you can always listen.

- Keep your body still, with no fidgeting or distractions, and connect with the person by showing you are paying full attention.
- Encouraging words, such as “I see,” let the person know you are listening.
- Encourage dialogue while being careful about what you say.
- Acknowledge when it is appropriate to say nothing: i.e. when it is too difficult for you to say something, when saying something would feel very false, when you don’t know the answer to a question they are raising

- Don't feel like you have to have answers or insight, just being present and listening is helpful.
- Communicate calmly. Make eye contact and use an open posture (for example: avoid crossing your arms or legs, lean forward, and stand or sit directly facing the person or group).
- Communicate warmth. Express empathy use a soft tone and welcoming gestures, and listen carefully and speak to the person with respect.
- Speak slowly. Repeat yourself, if necessary.
- Be factual and gentle and do not engage in speculation or make broad statements like "everything will be ok."
- Acknowledge the emotions of those who are suffering.
- Listen and allow for emotional expressions or crying without interruption.
- Avoid using examples from your own life and keep the focus on those currently suffering.
- Look for cues in body language and ask if they would like to be left alone.
- Limit distractions. Let a fellow staff member know you are going to need a few minutes, let the person you are in therapeutic conversation with that your time may be interrupted or limited.



Questions that encourage communication

Questions should be used to clarify a point or move the conversation along. They shouldn't be too personal, and above all, shouldn't be used to control the communication by determining what will and will not be discussed

Here are some examples:

- Where would you be comfortable talking?
- How can I help you?
- What is the situation as you see it?
- I am sorry. This must be hard for you. Do you want to talk about it?
- Can you tell me more about ...?
- What are some things you have thought of that might help?

Other useful strategies such as:

- Using the deceased's name
- Acknowledging his/her death: "I am sorry that XX has died."
- Talking about the deceased and memories associated with the deceased (particularly if you knew of their relationship between the deceased and the bereaved). You could ask: "what have you been remembering about XX?" "What do you miss most?"
- Exploring their support systems

When a family member mentions: *"This is overwhelming."*

The healthcare provider may respond:

- **Name:** *"You feel overwhelmed."* – Name what they just said.
- **Understand:** *"There is so much going on, how can I help you?"*
- **Respect:** *"I'm really impressed with how well you are handling everything."* – Express your respect for them in this situation.
- **Support:** *"I'll be here with you all shift."* – Show them that you are there for them.
- **Explore:** *"What is the hardest part?"* – Further the conversation with an open-ended question.

These techniques can be used individually or as a bundle.

What NOT to say

- Things happen for a reason.
- Don't feel bad
- Life goes on, so must you.
- Oh well, what can you do?
- Been there, done that.
- Get over it.
- I know exactly how you feel.
- He/She led a full life.
- I understand
- It's for the best
- Time heals
- Give examples of those who are "worse off"
- Give paternalistic responses such as: "your Mom is happy now" or "It's Gods will"

Your attitude towards this loss or your experience of a similar loss should not be the focus, so avoid saying these things that take the attention away from those you are meaning to help.

References:

How to talk to people facing loss: Communication tips for front-line workers. (August 2012).

Laurie M. Martin. Retrieved from

<https://charityvillage.com/how-to-talk-to-people-facing-loss-communication-tips-for-front-line-workers/> on August 28 2020

Oates JR, Maani-Fogelman PA. Nursing Grief and Loss. [Updated 2020 Aug 11]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2020 Jan-. Available from:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK518989>

Tips For Health Care Practitioners And Responders: Helping Survivors Cope With Grief After A Disaster Or Traumatic Event. May 2020. Substance Abuse Mental Health Services

Administration. Retrieved from www.SAMHSA.gov August 28 2020

The Pallium Palliative Pocketbook: a peer-reviewed, referenced resources. 2nd Cdn ed. Ottawa, Canada: Pallium Canada: 2008.



HPC Consultation Services
Waterloo Wellington

Communication Tips for Healthcare Workers Supporting Personal Caregivers Experiencing Grief During a Pandemic



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Body Language:

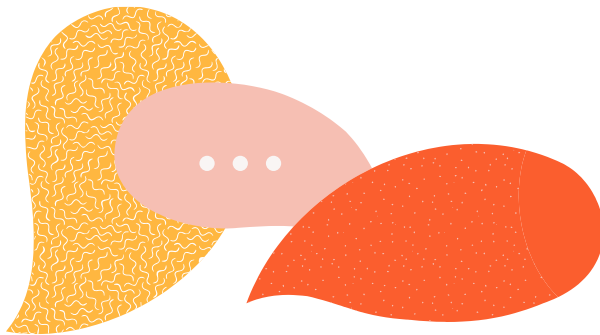
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- Communicate warmth. Express empathy use a soft tone and welcoming gestures, and listen carefully and speak to the person with respect.
- Look for cues in body language and check in with patient about potential cues you have picked up on. Try not to make assumptions.

Honoring Emotion:

- Acknowledge the emotions of those who are suffering.
- Listen and allow for emotional expressions or crying without interruption.

General Tips:

- Don't feel like you have to have answers or insight, just being present and listening is helpful.
- Speak slowly. Repeat yourself, if necessary.
- Be factual and gentle and do not engage in speculation or make broad statements like "everything will be ok."
- Using the deceased's name
 - Acknowledging his/her death: "I am sorry that XX has died."
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References

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Grief Debrief for Long Term Care Staff: ADVANCED FACILITATION TOOL



Debriefing is a broad term that can encompass a range of actions or follow up after distressing events. In this instance the focus is the support of staff in congregate care settings exposed to layers of grief and loss in the workplace that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of these sessions is to provide a safe environment for individuals to acknowledge, understand and look for ways to cope with the impacts of those losses.

Note: This tool is designed to be used by a Facilitator with Facilitator/difficult conversation training or direct experience with providing grief and bereavement support.

OPENING- SETTING THE STAGE

FACILITATOR TASK: Create an environment where participants feel comfortable and welcomed. Define how you are going to work together and outline the agenda for the session

Set up room in a circle if possible or in a configuration where participants can see each other. Provide paper and pen for notetaking. Provide Kleenex. Greet participants warmly, name tags with first names can be helpful. Recognizing an in person circle might not be possible in the context of the pandemic, a virtual circle can be created utilizing a platform such as zoom or Microsoft teams. Encourage participants to have Kleenex, pen and paper with them.

State clearly the purpose of the session, example: This conversation is not a critical incident debrief and the goal is not to determine cause or place blame in any way. The goal is to collectively create a safe place to reflect on what has happened as a shared supportive practice.

Invite participants to share in the development of a set of guidelines to help create a safe space. Here are some examples of common practice:

- No right or wrong in this conversation
- A commitment to non judgement
- Confidentiality
- If you feel you must leave, a support will follow up to ensure safety *note for Facilitator: be sure to establish who “support” person will be. This might be the Facilitator, a manager, peer etc.

Optional: Invite participants to get comfortable, invite participation in a guided breath exercise to calm and de stress participants that may be anxious.

EDUCATION- OVERVIEW OF GENERAL GRIEF CONCEPTS

FACILITATOR TASK: Provide an overview of basic grief concepts including common reactions.

The following concepts could be discussed:

- Grief is a healthy natural reaction to death or loss
- Disenfranchised grief
- Common grief reactions

DISCUSSION-REMEMBERING INDIVIDUALS AND/OR DEFINING THE LOSS

FACILITATOR TASK: Help participants remember an individual or identify other types of losses they are experiencing

If you are debriefing a shared loss of one person, have participants write down one or two words to describe the person they lost.

If it is multiple losses and/or different types of losses, such as the types they have likely experienced due to COVID19, have them write one or two words that name those losses. example: loss of time with family, loss of feeling safe at work etc. Ask those comfortable to share.

DISCUSSION- ACKNOWLEDGING

FACILITATOR TASK: To help the participant reflect on their initial response to the loss. What is your personal relationship or association with these losses? (could be based on present or past experiences)

Have participants jot a few sentences to answer one or more of the following questions:

Thinking about this loss...

What comes up for you?

What feelings come up for you?

What do you struggle with most?

What does it remind you of?

Ask those comfortable to share.

DISCUSSION- INTERPRETATIVE

FACILITATOR TASK: To help participants to build on their answers to previous questions to support meaning making. This helps participants to build a comprehensive story of the loss, including recognizing implications, significance and values.

Here are some suggested questions to enable the participant to build the layers of meaning. As a Facilitator, you can focus on meaning of the individual, organization or community or all, depending on what has emerged in the conversation or the group's needs.

What does this loss mean for you? What about this loss do you find most significant to you?

What does this loss mean for your workplace?

What does this loss mean for the community?

Ask those comfortable to share.

DISCUSSION-THE WAY FORWARD

FACILITATOR TASK: to pull the layers of the conversation together to inform next steps. Focus at this stage could be on the individual way forward. This allows for identification of strengths, needs and supports.

Here are some suggested questions to enable the participants to identify strengths, needs and ways forward.

In reflecting today, as well as hearing from others what needs do you have that require attention?

What might be the first step in tending to those needs?

Have you learned anything from others that might be helpful to you?

Have you learned anything about yourself?

Have you gained any insights that you would like to share with others?

Ask those comfortable to share.

CLOSING

This is an optional way of closing and may not be necessary, given the conversation above. This can be used to highlight important parts of the conversation and give participants more time to reflect.

Facilitator should be prepared to close the conversation sharing using the same conversational format drawing attention to the following:

What stood out about today's conversation in one or two words?

What meaning do you make of this?

What is different as a result of attending this conversation today?

**** Facilitator should identify organizational and community supports available and highlight**

OTHER RESOURCES REGARDING DEBRIEFING

The following resources are examples of formal and informal debriefings that organizations can incorporate for staff and volunteers providing hospice palliative care.

- [Long-Term Care Staff: Honouring Grief and Increasing Resiliency \(Champlain Hospice Palliative Care Program\)](#)
- [Peer Led Debriefing Toolkit: Guidelines for Promoting Effective Grief Support Among Front Line Staff \(Quality Palliative Care in Long Term Care Alliance\)](#)
- [What Format And Questions Would You Use In A Bereavement Debriefing Session For Health Care Staff? \(Canadian Virtual Hospice\)](#)

References:

Canadian Virtual Hospice: Topics: Grief work: available from:

https://www.virtualhospice.ca/en_US/Article/Emotional+Health/Grief+Work.aspx

Canadian Virtual Hospice: MyGrief.ca website. Available from: <https://mygrief.ca/>



Grief Debrief Guide for Long Term Care Staff



Debriefing is a broad term that can encompass a range of actions or follow up after distressing events. The focus of this one document is to support staff in congregate settings exposed to layers of grief and loss in the workplace that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing an in-person circle might not be possible in the context of the pandemic, staff may be participating in a virtual circle utilizing platforms such as Zoom or MS Teams. The goal of the debrief is to create a safe place for staff to reflect on what has happened and share from their perspective to the level of their comfort as a supportive practice. Confidentiality is always maintained, and there is no judgement, or right or wrong answers during the debrief.

TO INITIATE A DEBREF
Connect with your leader to initiate a group of individual debriefing session. If you would like to debrief individually with a professional other than your leader. Please call 1-844-437-3247 .
WHEN PARTICIPATING IN A DEBRIEF
Ensure the room allows you to participate to see other members of the team
<u>What to Bring:</u> a paper and pen for notetaking, and Kleenex, the debrief session may trigger some emotions, remember that you are in a supportive environment with colleagues that may be experiencing similar feelings
Give yourself a moment to arrive in practice (settle into a comfortable position, try to eliminate distractions such as your phone, take a few slow deep breaths).

REMEMBERING INDIVIDUALS AND/OR DEFINING THE LOSS(ES) YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING
<p><u>Using your pen and paper:</u> Right down one or two words to describe the person you lost. If you have experienced multiple losses or different types of losses due to COVID-19, write down one or two words that name those losses. <i>Example:</i> loss of time with my family, loss of feeling safe at work etc. Share this with other staff members during the debrief if you feel comfortable.</p>
REFLECTING ON YOUR INITIAL RESPONSES
<p>Write a few sentences to answer one or more of the following questions: Thinking about this loss.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What feelings come up for you? • What do you struggle with the most? • What does it remind you of?
BUILDING ON PREVIOUS RESPONSES AND SUPPORTING MEANING MAKING
<p>Consider the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does this loss mean for you? • What about this loss do you find most significant to you? • What does this loss mean for your workplace or community?
IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS, NEEDS, AND SUPPORTS
<p>While reflecting on what you have written and thought about, consider the following questions: What needs do you have that require attention? What might be the first step in tending to those needs? Have you learned anything from others that might be helpful to you? Have you learned anything about yourself? Have you gained any insights that you would like to share with others? What stood out about today's conversation if you could describe this in one or two words? What meaning do you make of this? What is different as a result of participating in this conversation today ?</p>



Mindfulness Information FOR FACILITATORS



What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness refers to bringing a nonjudgmental awareness of your mind and body to the present moment. While mindfulness has been practiced for thousands of years, in the last 40 years, it has been studied in many ways and earned strong support from the medical and scientific communities for its ability to help us reduce stress. ¹

According to mindfulness practitioner Sean Fargo: “Practicing mindfulness does not need to mean taking yourself off to some remote destination or even to a dark corner of your house, closing your eyes, sitting in silence for hours, and putting a stop to all thoughts.” ²

Mindfulness is simply about paying attention to what is happening right now in this moment. Research has shown that many of the benefits come about because of including mindfulness as a regular practice into your everyday life. (see list of benefits below) You can begin to build or strengthen your existing practice through bringing a few moments a day intentionally into your routine. ¹

While practicing mindfulness you can pay attention to what is happening externally in the world, in your work or home environment, as well as what is happening internally inside of yourself. As the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) for Ontario emphasizes, practicing mindfulness helps us appreciate the small joys in life and combat negative thoughts by mitigating our negative responses to stress. Your responsibilities can be incredibly taxing. Introducing moments of mindful practice into your day-to-day routine supports you when responding to crises. Focusing on reading a book, being present and mindful while sitting down for lunch or focusing on your surrounding while going for a walk are all examples of everyday mindfulness practices. More involved practices may include experiencing ‘full body scan,’ guided meditations or mindfulness-based therapies. ³

Scientifically proven benefits include:

1. Mindfulness rewires the brain.
2. Mindfulness teaches us to respond rather than react.
3. Mindfulness connects us to our inner peace.
4. Mindfulness can quiet the racing mind.
5. Mindfulness can help us to heal.
6. Mindfulness can never be taken from us. ¹

Or you might consider keeping a mindfulness journal to investigate how the power of mindfulness can help us to uncover who you are, what you are experiencing in the present moment ([Free mindfulness journal prompts](#)).

There are an ever-growing number of free online mindfulness resources to access and try. Remember, the best mindfulness practice is the one you do!

Facilitators are **strongly recommended** to select a brief practice to engage in with the participants during your session. It is important to ensure you select an appropriate and brief practice to explore together. For example, you might engage in some [Soft Belly Breathing](#) or lead a [Mindful eating exercise](#).

Mindfulness Resource links:

[Mindfulness Exercises & Free Meditations](#) website contains free mindfulness exercises, meditations, and courses.

[The Free Mindfulness Project](#) website which includes practices such as:

- Mindfulness of breath
 - These short mindfulness exercises focus on bringing awareness to the process of breathing. As something that we are doing all of the time, watching our breath allows us to come into the present moment and practice being aware.
- Brief mindfulness practices e.g. the three-minute mindfulness of sounds
- Body scan
 - Body scan meditations invite you to move your focus of attention around the body, being curious about your experience and observing any sensations that you become aware of.
- Sitting meditations
 - Sitting meditations often use the breath as the central focus of the practice. At times they incorporate awareness of sounds, bodily sensations, thoughts, or feelings.
- Mindful movement
 - Mindful movement practices involve some form of intentional movement such as walking, yoga, tai chi or simple stretching. The intention in the practice is often to focus on the breath and body, noticing sensations in moments of movement and moments of stillness.
- Guided imagery e.g. mountain meditation
- Self Guided Mindfulness Exercises

- Sometimes you may want to practice a meditation of your choosing without any guidance. These audio tracks begin and end with the sound of a bell ringing, to orientate you to the practice and to signify the end of the meditation.

[Getting Started with Mindfulness: Mindful website](#)

Free videos, guided practices and articles to support understanding mindfulness.

[Greater Good Science Centre](#) website. The Greater Good Science Center (University of California, Berkeley) studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being, and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society.

[Calming your Mind before Sleep](#) (part of the “mindfulness for beginners podcast”)

[Tara Brach Mindfulness Sitting Meditation Talk](#) This short talk and guided meditation offers an overview of what many people find is a natural unfolding within a meditation sitting.

References:

1. [What Stress does to the Body and how Mindfulness can help](#): Simply Well: UMass Memorial Medical Center
2. [6 Reasons that Mindfulness is a Superpower](#) (from: Mindfulness Exercises website: Sean Fargo (blog post))
3. Return to the Workplace: A psychological toolkit for heading back to work. (pg. 17) retrieved on September 1, 2020 from: https://ontario.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CMHA_ReturnToWorkplace-Toolkit_EN-Final.pdf



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