



Building a Positive Council–Operator Relationship in Long-Term Care

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The Effectiveness Tool

UBC Research:

"Raise Your Voice

How to Increase effectiveness of resident and family councils in long-term
care"

Canadian Journal on Aging

Today's roadmap

- 1 What "positive" looks like
- 2 Challenges
- 3 Issues = OPPORTUNITIES
- 4 Solutions
- 5 Conclusion

What a “positive” relationship looks like

With the goal aligned, let's define what a positive relationship looks like.

- Mutual Respect, Appreciation and Trust
- Clear, honest, and 2-way, closed loop, regular, communication
- Collaboration and shared decision-making
- Commitment and Accountability
- Focus on the Shared Goal



What does “positive” require?

Requires trust and trust may take time.



- Establish Proactive and Transparent Communication Channels

- Address Issues Early:
Focus on Collective Interests:
Evidence-Based

- Shift from “conflict” to Collaboration

- Joint Event, Project, Initiative, Process Planning

Operational Challenges

.Despite good intentions, multiple structural, psychosocial, and systemic barriers interfere with respectful and effective Council–Operator relationships

Staffing Continuity

Shortages, turnover, and rotating shifts reduce continuity and relationship-building.

Limited Time

Demanding workloads, understaffing, constrain meaningful engagement depth.

Meetings and Channels

Infrequent or poorly structured unclear follow-up or agendas. Disconnected from decision-makers.

Systemic Issues

Decision making not held at the site level; underfunding, mixing of populations, reliance of status quo.

Family and Family Council Challenges

.Despite good intentions, multiple psychosocial, and caregiver burdens interfere with respectful and effective Council–Operator relationships

Family Continuity

Turnover of residents reduce member continuity and ability to sustain relationship-building.

Limited Time

Demanding multi-roles of the family; time constraint; depth of engagement

Meetings

Infrequent or poorly structured; unclear follow-up or agendas. Poorly promoted or supported councils get lost.

Psychosocial and Cultural Challenges

Unmet expectations; difference in values, guilt, financial obligations and caregiver role

There are no problems here...

Issues → Opportunities

Issues

- Communication gaps
- Unclear roles and expectations
- Emotional strain and burnout
- Limited engagement and trust
- Reactive problem-solving

Opportunities

- Strengthen meaningful communication
- Clarify roles through collaboration
- Build supportive, respectful relationships
- Foster engagement and shared purpose
- Shift to proactive, solution-focused approaches



A Solution for Family Councils

Build Skills & Understanding

- Connect councils with regional/provincial associations for mentorship in the
 - **relationship triangle,**
 - **gentle advocacy,**
 - **appreciative inquiry**compassionate curiosity.

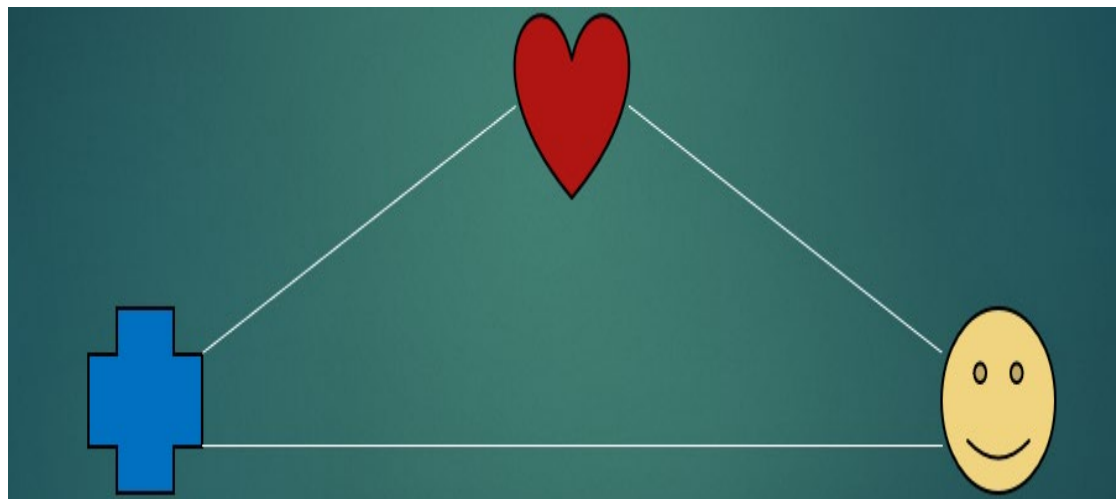


Relationship Triangle

Once families are accepted as part of the care team then, navigating that role and its interdependency with staff and your loved one can take place with successful results for the sake of all residents.

The Relational Triangle by [Deborah Bakti](#)

- a. Awareness
- b. Acknowledgement
- c. Adapt
- d. Accept
- e. Allow
- f. Accountable
- g. Appreciate



Gentle Advocacy

Family Council Principles of Gentle Advocacy

Relationship-Based: We build trust with staff, recognizing they work hard in a high-demand environment.

Solution-Oriented: We focus on constructive, timely solutions rather than just complaints.

Respectful Dialogue: We use respectful input & feedback to help care team understand resident needs.

Collaborative Action: We work with management to enhance quality of life, using the Family Council Code of Conduct to guide how we show up.

Appreciative Inquiry

Questions

1. Definition Question

“What’s our focus?”

– Sets Intention

2. Discovery Question

“What is working well?”

– Builds on Strengths

3. Dream Question

“What might be?”

– Inspires Vision

4. Design Question

“What should be?”

– Describes deliverables

5. Destiny Question

“How to empower, learn, and improvise?”

– Maps direction

Care Home Solution: Embed Collaboration

Embed collaboration into the way decisions get made.

- Care homes: Involve councils early, using forums for partnership rather than complaint escalation.
- Seek mentorship from provincial associations of family councils to guide both care home leaders and councils.
- Design processes that reflect resident autonomy and family council insight from the start.



Example: Consult the Family Council on new menu plans or recreation ideas before decisions are finalized.

Care Home Solutions: Strengthen Communication

First, strengthen the communication infrastructure.

- Standardize tools: newsletters, bulletin boards, web pages, and shared platforms, admission package, resource rack, pamphlet
- Update distribution list with newcomers on first day, share the organization chart, update as it changes
- Promote and engage councils (invite to committees, accreditation, employee recognition programs)
- Map decision authority to route feedback to the right people.
- Structure meetings with clear agendas, follow-ups, and accountability.



Care Home and Family Council Solution

Sustain commitment

Finally, sustain the commitment over time.

- Partnerships take time; maintain communication lines even when challenges arise.
- Re-anchor on the shared goal: resident safety, dignity, and quality of life.

**A positive relationship isn't just a goal
—it's a daily practice of respect and shared purpose.**

Solution Summary

- Know what **positive** looks like – **Live it**
- Understand what a **positive relationship** requires
- **Be aware:** operational, Individual family and Family council challenges
- Re-anchor on the **shared goal:** resident safety, dignity, and quality of life.
- Strengthen **communication**
- **Build skills** & understanding
- **Embed Collaboration**
- Formalize **expectations**
- **Sustain commitment**

Our next education session is June 9 at 1:00PM

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

Description: When a loved one dies in long-term care, families are often grieving while also facing urgent decisions, unfamiliar processes, and legal responsibilities. This practical and compassionate education session brings together Dignity Memorial and Westcoast Wills & Estates to help family members understand what to expect and how to be prepared before a death occurs.

Designed especially for long-term care family councils, this session gently guides participants through the steps that follow a death in care, including immediate procedures, documentation, funeral planning, and estate considerations. Attendees will leave with clarity, confidence, and practical knowledge to reduce stress during an emotionally difficult time and to ensure a smoother, more dignified transition for their loved one and family.

Thank you
Let's continue the conversation.

Q&A

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