

# Tips to Communicate with Empathy

## During a Pandemic

Maintaining a culture of person-centered care is important at all times — even during a pandemic. The following tips from Planetree International can help your organization exercise authentic empathy when communicating nursing home policy changes to residents, family and staff.



### 3 Essential Elements for Effectively Showing Authentic Empathy:

#### 1. Recognize

- During every interaction with another person, ask yourself:
  - What are you seeing in the person you are connecting with?
  - What are you hearing in the person's response or reaction?
  - What are your feelings in response?

#### 2. Communicate

- Proactively acknowledge the stress or frustration with new policies an individual may be experiencing.
- *For example: It sounds like you are very frustrated with not being able to see your Mom right now. We want to assure you that your loved one as well as all other patients are our top priority as we work to move through this situation together.*

#### 3. Support

- Provide a solutions-oriented response whenever possible. Avoid relying exclusively on policy.
- *For example: We have identified a few options for virtual visits that may be helpful. Can I share these with you now? Again, we deeply apologize for any inconvenience and thank you for your understanding.*

- The core of patient-centered care is communicating the “*why*” -- the reason a policy was changed
- Try to focus on your partnership with the person with whom you are communicating
- Words matter -- they create the construct for our experience. Words such as “*lock down,*” or “*war*” or “*hot one*” can all evoke feeling of fear and anxiety

### Communicating with Residents:

- Completing or revising a Preference Assessment with residents during quarantine can help reassure you are listening and care about their needs
- Set up opportunities for virtual meetings with families and loved ones
- Where possible, offer to rearrange their room to facilitate individual activities they enjoy
- Look for ways to overcome risks to well-being that arise from isolation

### Communicating with Staff:

- If staff is to be fully present at work, they need to know their family is safe
- Consider an “end of shift” event to help people leave work behind
- Reach out to your employees; don't rely on employees to reach out to you
- Employ “One Minute of Kindness”. This can carry someone through the day
- Support staff in a way that enables them to be kind to patients and families
- Remember that extra grace may be required