

## Talking with Families

Careworkers have the most day-to-day contact with residents so it is common for family members to ask you questions about the person, their decline and care options. You may worry about what to say to the family or be afraid that you might say the wrong thing and perhaps try to avoid the topic or even family members and friends completely. However, when you have permission to talk with families, talking openly with them is an important part of a palliative approach and can improve your relationship with them.

### Key messages

- Talking with families can be difficult but it is important so that you are more aware of their needs and wishes. This will allow you to support them and the resident as the resident's condition worsens.
- Ongoing and open communication with families is important to ensure the best outcomes for the resident and their family.

### What can you do?

- Understand a palliative approach to care and the dying process. This can help you to better engage with families and to explain to them what is happening to their loved one.
- Talk to the family about the care you are providing to the resident and be open about any changes in the resident's condition.
- Listen to the family's needs and concerns. Try to reassure them if you are able to and this is part of your role. If you are unsure, or the family would like more information than you can provide, ask the nurse to come and speak with them and help with any appropriate cultural practices.
- Encourage the family's involvement in the care of their relative – e.g. brushing their hair, giving them a gentle massage. This can help them to be a valued part of the care process.
- Be aware of the different cultural backgrounds of your residents and their families. Ask them about any customs and beliefs that are important so you are able to respect them.
- Acknowledge and respect any differing views among family members on the care being provided to a resident. If there is obvious conflict, be sure to involve the nurse in the discussions.
- If invited, attend a palliative care case conference and share your observations about the resident, or write down any issues you feel should be talked about and give them to the nursing staff to raise on your behalf.
- Find out if your facility has strategies to support family members – e.g. pastoral care or social worker, so you can let the family know about them if they want emotional or spiritual support.

### Why it works

Ongoing and open communication between families and the aged care team can help the family know what to expect. This can reduce the family's fears or concerns about the care of their loved one and can increase the family's satisfaction with the care being given.

### Related pages

[PA Toolkit Fact Sheet 9: Palliative Care Case Conferences](#) – clicking here will take you to a printable version of a fact sheet about case conferences and the role of the careworker.

### Relevant links

CareSearch – [www.caresearch.com.au](http://www.caresearch.com.au)  
Residential Aged Care Palliative Approach Toolkit – [www.caresearch.com.au/PAToolkit](http://www.caresearch.com.au/PAToolkit)

