

PURPOSE



We champion shared learning across the clinical and executive leaders of Minnesota's assisted living and skilled care settings.

Through supportive dialogue grounded in the ECHO principle of “all teach, all learn,” our virtual community of interdisciplinary leaders shares promising practices to improve operational outcomes and quality of life as we age.



WELCOME: September 8, 2026



THE CHECK-IN



**WHAT EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION
STRATEGIES CAN WE USE
DURING A CRISIS?**



**ALL TEACH.
ALL LEARN.**



WELCOME



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WHAT EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES CAN WE USE DURING A CRISIS?

FEATURING



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What effective communications strategies can we use during a crisis?

Practical decision-making for leaders when the facts are incomplete and the clock is running

Crisis communications = decision-making

It's deciding:

WHO needs to hear from us

WHAT they need to know now

WHEN to communicate

WHO should deliver it

HOW to respond as the situation changes

IN A CRISIS, YOU ARE USUALLY BALANCING

Speed vs. **Accuracy**

Transparency vs. **Privacy**

Proactive vs. **Reactive**

There is rarely one perfect answer. There should be a deliberate one.

Five questions before you communicate

	The question	What to think about
1	What do we actually know?	Separate confirmed facts from assumptions, reports and rumors. Be just as clear about what you don't know yet.
2	Who is affected?	Think beyond the person at the center of the incident. Who else is experiencing the impact?
3	Who needs to hear from us?	Team members? Residents? Families? Partners? Regulators? Media? Not every audience needs the same message — or the same timing.
4	What do they need from us right now?	Information, reassurance, direction, action — or simply acknowledgment. Broad or targeted? Transparent — but how much?
5	What happens if we wait?	Now or later? Proactive or reactive? Sometimes waiting protects accuracy. Sometimes silence creates a bigger problem.

When you communicate, keep it simple

VALUES

Start with what matters

Safety, dignity, care, trust, responsibility

FACTS

Say what is confirmed

What happened — without speculation or unnecessary detail

WHAT WE DID

Explain the immediate response

Actions already taken to address the situation

WHAT WE'LL DO

Set expectations

Next steps, follow-up, support or when another update may come

VALUES

Close where you started

Reinforce the principle guiding your response

Your core message
Adapt for different audiences

One core message, for different audiences

Keep the facts consistent. Adapt the emphasis.

Audience	What to emphasize
Residents and families	Care and safety of the person involved, what is being done now, and when they will hear from us next.
Team members	What happened, what they should and should not say, and where to send questions.
Partners and regulators	Confirmed facts, required reporting, and the steps underway to address the situation.
Media and the public	A brief, accurate statement — no speculation, no private details.

- AVOID**
- × Speculating about cause or intent
 - × Predicting outcomes
 - × Making promises you can't guarantee
 - × Sharing details just because someone asked
 - × Letting different audiences hear different versions of the facts

The audience changes. The facts don't.

Know when the problem is bigger than you

Signals to escalate

- Serious injury or death
- Abuse, neglect, or misconduct
- Law enforcement involvement
- Regulatory scrutiny
- Threat of or active litigation
- Media attention or fast-moving public conversation
- Significant privacy questions
- Uncertainty about what you can/cannot say

Who might you need

- Executive / operational leadership
- Legal counsel
- Communications / PR support
- Clinical or regulatory experts
- Risk / insurance partners
- Emergency or law enforcement partners

Bring expertise to the table. Do not hand the whole incident to one function.

A crisis keeps moving. Your comms do too.

Update when something meaningful changes.

Crisis communication is rarely one message and done. You communicate, listen, adjust and communicate again.

Watch for changes in	What to watch for
Facts	What do we know now that we didn't know before?
Questions	What are people asking repeatedly?
Conversation	Are rumors, media coverage or social posts changing the situation?
Impact	Are people confused, worried or taking the wrong action?
Risk	Has the situation escalated enough that you need to change course or bring in more help?

The crisis communications playbook

	The step	What it means
1	Get the facts	What is confirmed? What is still unknown?
2	Map the audiences	Who is affected, and who needs information now?
3	Choose your approach	Communicate now or wait? Proactive or reactive?
4	Build the message	Values → Facts → Action → Next steps → Values
5	Bring in help	Escalate when the stakes or uncertainty require it.
6	Keep watching	Questions, rumors and facts will change — your message may need to as well.

The goal is not perfect communication. It is clear, credible communication that keeps pace with the situation and meets the needs of a diverse set of audiences.

Now you're in it

Each group will receive the same basic incident — with one important wrinkle.

Use the playbook:

- **Get the facts:** What do you know? What don't you know?
- **Map the audience:** Who needs to hear from you?
- **Choose your approach:** Now or later? Proactive or reactive? Broad or targeted?
- **Build the message:** What is your core message?
- **Bring in help:** Who else needs to be involved?
- **Keep watching:** What would you monitor next?

REMEMBER

There may be more than one defensible answer.

Be ready to explain what drove your decision.

Scenario A: The Facebook post

The facts:

- A resident was injured during an interaction with a team member.
- The resident was transported for medical evaluation.
- The team member was removed from duty while the organization gathers more information.
- Leadership is reviewing what happened and completing required reporting.
- The resident's family has been notified.
- The cause of the incident and full sequence of events are not yet confirmed.

Your communications challenge

A family member posts publicly on Facebook, saying the organization is “covering up abuse.” Other people begin commenting and sharing the post.

Scenario B: Local media attention

The facts:

- A resident was injured during an interaction with a team member.
- The resident was transported for medical evaluation.
- The team member was removed from duty while the organization gathers more information.
- Leadership is reviewing what happened and completing required reporting.
- The resident's family has been notified.
- The cause of the incident and full sequence of events are not yet confirmed.

Your communications challenge

A local reporter calls the community and says they have heard a resident was injured during an interaction with a team member. They are asking what happened and whether the team member is still working.

Scenario C: The workplace rumor mill

The facts:

- A resident was injured during an interaction with a team member.
- The resident was transported for medical evaluation.
- The team member was removed from duty while the organization gathers more information.
- Leadership is reviewing what happened and completing required reporting.
- The resident's family has been notified.
- The cause of the incident and full sequence of events are not yet confirmed.

Your communications challenge

Team members are talking about the incident, and different versions of what happened are beginning to circulate. Some team members are asking their supervisors what they should tell residents and families who have questions.

Scenario D: Law enforcement involvement

The facts:

- A resident was injured during an interaction with a team member.
- The resident was transported for medical evaluation.
- The team member was removed from duty while the organization gathers more information.
- Leadership is reviewing what happened and completing required reporting.
- The resident's family has been notified.
- The cause of the incident and full sequence of events are not yet confirmed.

Your communications challenge

Law enforcement contacts the community and begins investigating the incident. Word of their presence spreads quickly, and residents and families begin asking why police are there.

Scenario E: Regulatory scrutiny

The facts:

- A resident was injured during an interaction with a team member.
- The resident was transported for medical evaluation.
- The team member was removed from duty while the organization gathers more information.
- Leadership is reviewing what happened and completing required reporting.
- The resident's family has been notified.
- The cause of the incident and full sequence of events are not yet confirmed.

Your communications challenge

A state regulator arrives at the community to follow up on the incident. At the same time, families begin noticing the increased activity and asking staff whether something serious has happened.

Scenario F: Family concerns

The facts:

- A resident was injured during an interaction with a team member.
- The resident was transported for medical evaluation.
- The team member was removed from duty while the organization gathers more information.
- Leadership is reviewing what happened and completing required reporting.
- The resident's family has been notified.
- The cause of the incident and full sequence of events are not yet confirmed.

Your communications challenge

Another resident's family learns about the incident and contacts the community. They want to know whether their loved one ever received care from the team member involved and whether they should be concerned about their safety.

Scenario G: Community concerns

The facts:

- A resident was injured during an interaction with a team member.
- The resident was transported for medical evaluation.
- The team member was removed from duty while the organization gathers more information.
- Leadership is reviewing what happened and completing required reporting.
- The resident's family has been notified.
- The cause of the incident and full sequence of events are not yet confirmed.

Your communications challenge

A referral partner contacts your organization after hearing about the incident. They say they are concerned about what happened and ask what the organization is doing in response.

All teach. All learn.

What did your group wrestle with most?

- **Be ready to share:**
 - Your communications challenge
 - The decision that was hardest to make
 - What drove your decision
- **As you listen, notice:**
 - What stayed the same?
 - What changed?
 - Where did different groups make different — but still defensible — choices?

All teach. All learn.

What changed the communications strategy?

- Things that may change:
 - Audience
 - Urgency
 - Visibility
 - Risk
 - Need for outside help
 - How proactive you need to be
- But some things should stay consistent:
 - The confirmed facts
 - Your values
 - Your core message
 - Your discipline about what you do — and do not — know

When you're in it

You do not need to have every answer.

- You do need to:
 - **Get the facts.**
 - **Know your audiences.**
 - **Choose your approach.**
 - **Build a disciplined message.**
 - **Bring in help when you need it.**
 - **Keep watching.**