Contacting Relatives by Phone to Communicate Death of a Resident During the COVID-19 Pandemic

**STEP 1: PREPARE**
- Take a moment to compose yourself. These are difficult calls to make especially if you know the family well and you are upset yourself. A few slow deep breaths will help you focus and stay calm.
- Check resident’s information: resident’s name? Did they have a partner/children/grandchildren?
- Consider rehearsing/role playing what you are going to say with a colleague.
- Find a space where you won’t be interrupted. Switch your mobile phone off. Use a landline to make the call.

**STEP 2: STARTING OFF**
- Introduce yourself by name.
- Clearly explain which Care Home you are calling from.
- Establish who you are speaking to and their relationship to the resident.
- Check they can talk privately.
- Speak slowly with pauses between sentences. Counting to 3 in your head can help slow you down, particularly if you’re feeling nervous.
- If the person is very distressed they may ask straight away if their relative has died – still use the ‘Setting the scene’.
- If the person does not answer the phone – DO NOT leave a voicemail.

**STEP 3: SETTING THE SCENE**
- Briefly set context for telephone call.
- Ask if there is anyone else (e.g. partner) they want to be in on the call too.
- Remember to speak slowly, clearly and with pauses.

**STEP 4: SHARING THE NEWS**
- Talk VERY slowly, honestly and compassionately.
- After you have told the person that the resident has died, STOP for a few seconds to allow the person to take in what you have said.
- Relatives have found comfort in knowing who was with their loved one at the end of their life.
- Listen for reactions to gauge when they are ready for more information.
- Remember pauses are important as you can’t see the other person’s reaction to what you are saying.

**STEP 5: RESPONDING TO THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF THE NEWS**
- Support person with their own feelings/distress about the bereavement.
- Distress will make it harder for them to take in any information.
- Silences can feel uncomfortable and longer than they actually are on the telephone. It is difficult to know how a person is reacting when you can’t see them; there may be other people in earshot including grandchildren.
- Don’t feel you have to fill the silences.
- Using sounds and words, e.g. ‘uh-huh’, ‘mmm’, “take your time — I’m still here” replaces eye contact or touch, and confirms your presence.

**STEP 6: ESTABLISH IF THE RESIDENT WAS A GRANDPARENT**
- Check if the resident was a grandparent; names/approximate ages of children
- If resident was a grandparent and children are under 25 years, go to Page 2.
- If grandchildren are over 25 years, or resident not a grandparent, go to Step 7.

**STEP 7: MAKE A PLAN**
- Finish by explaining what will happen next, using most up to date information regarding death certification, personal belongings etc.
- Check if there are any religious/cultural rites or rituals needed.
- Reassure them they will not have to manage this alone; direct to established bereavement services and online resources.
- Update resident file and tell other staff that the next of kin have been told.
- These are emotionally exhausting conversations. Take a minute to check how you are feeling/take 5-mins/cup of tea/snack/talk to your team.

### Notes
- “Hello, my name is xx. I am part of the care team who has been looking after [Name].”
- “Is there somewhere quiet that you can talk at the moment?”
- “Can I just check who is at home with you now?”
- “Shall I call you back in 5 minutes when you’ve had a chance to put the TV on/find a game for the children?”

- “I’m calling to talk about [Name].”
- “What have you been told so far about their health?”
- “I am sorry to have to tell you this over the phone and not in person” PAUSE

- “I’m very sorry to tell you that [Name] became very unwell and has died. I’m so sorry.”
- “[Name of carer] was with [Name] when they died.”
- “I am very sorry to give you this news over the phone.”
- “Would you like me to repeat anything?”
- “I understand this might be very difficult to take in… just take a few moments”

- If person is crying or shouting: “I understand that it is very upsetting news, particularly by telephone.”
- If person repeatedly says “it’s not true, it can’t be”: “I understand this is very difficult for you to take in.”
- If person goes very quiet or says ‘thank you for letting me know’: “This news can be very difficult to take in; would you like me to help you think about what you need to do next?”

- “Does [Name] have any grandchildren who will need to be told?”
- “Are they with you at home right now?”

- “I understand this has been a very difficult conversation. There has been a lot to take in; is there anything you do not understand?”
- “Just to recap, my name is xx, the next steps will be [refer to latest protocol for Coronavirus related deaths]”
The page contains advice on how to talk to children about a grandparent's death during the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasizes the importance of explaining what has happened to children, even if they are very young. It suggests preparing people for the common questions that children may ask and provides a step-by-step guide on how to communicate the news. The advice also includes tips on how to handle emotional conversations and maintain self-care during the process. The document is authored by Dr Louise Dalton, Dr Elizabeth Rapa, Helena Channon-Wells, Dr Sally Hope, and Prof Alan Stein.