

Because of COVID-19 and the resulting visitation restrictions, friends and family have lost a lot of time with those living in long-term care. During this time, their loved one may have gone through many changes due to age, illness, or disease. The loss of time, loss of health, and loss of their relationship, as it once was can lead to grief. This can cause many different emotions, including sadness, anger, anxiety, frustration, guilt, and helplessness.

It is important to respond to these emotions effectively. When emotions are ignored or poorly acknowledged, it can seem like they don't matter. However, when emotions are acknowledged, it can help lessen the power behind them.

If you are a care worker and one of your residents' visitors is experiencing strong feelings when they are talking to you, try these strategies to help you through the conversation.

Validate the emotion. By naming the emotion and normalizing it, the person is more likely to feel heard and understood.

Listen actively. Concentrate on what is being said with the intention of understanding, instead of replying.

Give time. Don't rush the conversation, even if you are busy. Rushing can make the person feel like you don't care.

Consider your body language. Maintain eye contact, an open posture, and interested expression to communicate your concern and attention.

Be empathetic. Think about how you would feel if you were in their position.

What They Say	What You Say
I can't believe how bad he's gotten since I was here last... it's so unfair that I couldn't be here for him.	I'm sorry that you haven't been able to visit for so long. It must be scary that your grandpa's condition seems much worse now than it did the last time you were here.
My mother used to be so lively and independent. Now all she can do is sit here. How did this happen?	It must be difficult to see all the changes in your mom's health so suddenly. This would make me feel upset too.
Since all this COVID stuff started, my poor Dad has been locked up here like a prisoner. And now he's blaming me for not coming to visit him!	I can understand why you are feeling frustrated. The visitation restrictions have been so hard on everyone, and you want your Dad to know that he is supported and loved.
He must have been so bored and lonely without any visitors over the last year.	I can see you're feeling sad about how you weren't able to come and visit for so long. It wasn't your fault.
I'm scared.	This is a tough situation. I think anyone would be scared. Could you share more with me?
You people are incompetent!	I can see why you are not happy with the situation. I am willing to do what is in my power to improve things for you. What could I do that would help?
I want to talk to your boss.	I can see you are frustrated. I will ask my supervisor to come by as soon as they can. Please realize that they are juggling many things right now.

References

- <https://www.caregiver.org/resource/grief-and-loss/>
- https://www.vitaltalk.org/wp-content/uploads/VitalTalk_COVID_English.pdf
- <https://bcpsqc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ConversationsMatterFINAL.pdf>
- <https://albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/pf/pe/if-pf-pe-patient-family-centred-care-resource-kit.pdf>