

The Staff Communication Playbook

What to say. What to avoid. How to lead the conversation.

THE STANDARD

Every important conversation should have a purpose, preserve dignity, establish understanding, and produce a responsible next step.

For group home owners, administrators, supervisors, shift leads, and anyone responsible for communicating with staff.

Use the phrases as starting points, not word-for-word demands. Check facts, invite the staff member's perspective, and adapt to your role, policies, and the situation.

THE FIVE HABITS

1. Know the purpose | 2. Describe the facts | 3. Listen | 4. Set expectations with respect | 5. Close with ownership.

Safety first: A conversation guide does not replace emergency response, safeguarding, mandatory reporting, employment policies, or individual support plans.

Find your starting phrase

Locate the situation you face. Every topic includes a start, an unhelpful phrase to avoid, a better phrase, a listening question, and a closing step.

- 01 Welcome & first expectations
- 02 Clarify a task
- 03 Delegate without hovering
- 04 Missed documentation
- 05 Correct a mistake
- 06 Hear staff frustration
- 07 Give difficult feedback
- 08 Receive feedback
- 09 Manage disagreement
- 10 Set a respectful boundary
- 11 Explain a change
- 12 Address team tension
- 13 Ask for backup
- 14 Recognize good work
- 15 Close an unresolved request
- 16 Safety concern or suspected harm

BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Am I the right person? Is this urgent or reportable? What facts do I know? What outcome do I need? What can I genuinely offer?

01 Welcome & first expectations

When a new team member joins

START HERE

What would help you feel prepared for your first shift?

AVOID THIS

You should already know how things work here.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

Here are our key routines and where the approved plans live. Which parts should we walk through together?

LISTEN / ASK What training or access do you still need?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Let's identify your point of contact and check in after your first shift.

02 Clarify a task

When directions could be misunderstood

START HERE

Can we confirm what needs to happen on this shift?

AVOID THIS

Just take care of everything.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

The priority is the evening handoff by 9 p.m. Please include the required updates using our approved process.

LISTEN / ASK Is the expected format and timing workable?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY You'll complete the handoff; I'll check whether any tools are missing.

03 Delegate without hovering

When transferring responsibility

START HERE

I have a task I'd like you to take the lead on.

AVOID THIS

I need you to handle this. Don't mess it up.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

Could you organize the supply inventory by Thursday? We need an accurate count, and I can show you our checklist.

LISTEN / ASK What do you need to own this task?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Let's agree on the finished list and a Thursday check-in.

04 Missed documentation

When an expected record is incomplete

START HERE

Can we review yesterday's missing shift note?

AVOID THIS

You never do your documentation.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

The shift note was not completed by handoff. Accurate records help the next team know what support occurred. What happened?

LISTEN / ASK Was there a barrier with time, access, or understanding?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Confirm the appropriate correction and follow the recordkeeping policy; no backdating or guessing.

05 Correct a mistake

When a task was done incorrectly

START HERE

I noticed a difference between the instruction and what happened. Can we walk through it?

AVOID THIS

How could you get something so simple wrong?

TRY THIS INSTEAD

The checklist called for two checks, and I see only one recorded. Let's establish what actually happened and what needs correction.

LISTEN / ASK Was the instruction clear? What did you observe?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Agree on a safe correction, needed coaching, and a review date.

06 Hear staff frustration

When a staff member says something is not working

START HERE

I want to understand what's making this shift difficult.

AVOID THIS

Everybody is stressed. Just deal with it.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

You mentioned that handoffs are rushed. Which part is most difficult, and what change might help?

LISTEN / ASK What have you already tried?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Choose one feasible adjustment and check whether it helps.

07 Give difficult feedback

When expectations have not been met

START HERE

I need to discuss a specific concern, and I want to hear your perspective.

AVOID THIS

Your attitude is the problem.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

At two team meetings, others were interrupted before finishing. I need everyone to have a chance to speak. What was happening from your view?

LISTEN / ASK What would help us make that expectation workable?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Name the expected behavior and when you will review it.

08 Receive feedback

When staff give a concern about leadership

START HERE

Thank you for telling me. Can you give me an example?

AVOID THIS

That's not what I meant, so you're wrong.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

I hear that the schedule change was announced too late. I'll review how we communicate changes.

LISTEN / ASK What impact did the timing have?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY State what you can change, what you need to verify, and when you'll respond.

09 Manage disagreement

When people see a situation differently

START HERE

We may be seeing this differently. Let's compare what each of us knows.

AVOID THIS

Stop arguing with me.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

I understand you see a scheduling problem. I'm also responsible for safe coverage. Let's list the constraints and options.

LISTEN / ASK What facts or options am I missing?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Explain the decision, rationale, and next review point.

10 Set a respectful boundary

When a request cannot be granted

START HERE

I want to explain what I can and cannot approve.

AVOID THIS

Because I said so.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

I can't approve an untrained staff member for that assignment. We can look at qualified coverage or reschedule the nonessential task.

LISTEN / ASK What alternate option would work within our requirements?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Confirm the safe available option and who arranges it.

11 Explain a change

When priorities or schedules shift

START HERE

The plan has changed. Here is what we know right now.

AVOID THIS

Everything changed again. Figure it out.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

The appointment moved to Friday. The transportation request needs updating today; the rest of the routine stays the same.

LISTEN / ASK What will this affect on your shift?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Name the owner, update the correct channels, and confirm receipt.

12 Address team tension

When coworkers have a conflict

START HERE

I want to address the specific concern fairly and privately.

AVOID THIS

You two are being dramatic.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

I've heard conflicting accounts of the handoff. I'll speak with each of you and review the record before deciding next steps.

LISTEN / ASK What did you personally observe rather than hear secondhand?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Agree on respectful conduct; use HR or formal procedures when appropriate.

13 Ask for backup

When the owner or supervisor needs assistance

START HERE

I need help with a specific operational priority today.

AVOID THIS

Nobody ever helps me around here.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

We have an uncovered afternoon shift. Can you check qualified availability and report options by noon? I'll handle agency calls.

LISTEN / ASK What is realistically possible with current staffing?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Confirm roles, timing, and an alternate escalation route.

14 Recognize good work

When someone did something helpful

START HERE

I want to recognize something specific you did.

AVOID THIS

Good job, I guess.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

You explained the schedule change calmly and checked that everyone understood. That kept the handoff clear. Thank you.

LISTEN / ASK What helped you handle it that way?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Reinforce the practice without comparing staff or sharing private resident details.

15 Close an unresolved request

When an agreement has not happened

START HERE

We agreed on a next step last week. Can we review its status?

AVOID THIS

You promised, and nothing ever gets done.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

We planned to finish the inventory by Tuesday. It remains incomplete. What is the current status and what is needed to resolve it?

LISTEN / ASK What changed since our agreement?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Confirm a realistic new action or use the appropriate escalation process.

16 Safety concern or suspected harm

When immediate safety or mandated reporting may apply

START HERE

I'm concerned about safety. We need to act according to the emergency and reporting procedure now.

AVOID THIS

Let's keep this quiet until we know for sure.

TRY THIS INSTEAD

First ensure immediate safety and call emergency services when needed. Follow the applicable reporting rules promptly; do not substitute an informal coaching conversation.

LISTEN / ASK What immediate protective steps and required notifications are needed?

CLOSE WITH CLARITY Use official procedures and authorized documentation; do not promise secrecy or conduct an improvised investigation.

Plan the conversation

Use this sheet before a conversation or to prepare a factual follow-up. Keep sensitive information in approved systems.

Purpose of this conversation

What I actually observed (facts, dates, sources)

What I need to understand from the staff member

My opening sentence

One clear expectation or request

Support or resources I can offer

Who owns the next action / due date

When and how we will check back

Quick guardrails for leaders

Be specific, not personal

Address observed actions and clear expectations. Avoid labels such as lazy, careless, or difficult.

Invite input without surrendering safety

Listen carefully. Some requirements cannot be negotiated; explain the reasons and safe alternatives.

Do not mistake agreement for understanding

Ask: "What are your next steps?" Offer clarification; avoid treating a recap as a memory test.

Handle urgent matters as urgent matters

For imminent danger, abuse or neglect concerns, medication incidents, and other reportable events, use the required response and reporting procedures immediately. Do not wait for a scheduled conversation.

Protect privacy

Do not put resident identifiers, health details, or staff personnel matters in public handouts or broad group messages. Use authorized channels and applicable policies.

Document responsibly

Keep objective records in the appropriate system. Do not backdate, guess, promise confidentiality you cannot provide, or claim this worksheet is an official record.

Follow through

Close each conversation with a specific owner, action, date, and a planned check-in. If something changes, communicate promptly.

HUNTERS HELPERS BRIDGE METHOD

SEE the facts. SORT the decision. SUPPORT the conversation. SUSTAIN the follow-through.