



The National Long-Term Care
Ombudsman Resource Center

MODULE FIVE

Access & Communication

Table of Contents

Module 5 State-Specific Information.....	2
Section 1: Welcome and Introduction.....	4
Section 2: Access.....	10
Section 3: Confidentiality and Disclosure of Ombudsman Program Information.....	21
Section 4: Communication Strategies	29
Section 5: Conclusion.....	41

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Module 5 State-Specific Information

The list below outlines state-specific information for trainers to discuss, provide a link to, or add directly to the Trainer Guide, Trainee Manual, and/or PowerPoints. When you get to the point in the training where you need to discuss, include a link to, or add state-specific information, you will see a **bold, blue arrow (→)** and a brief description of what to include.

→ State-Specific Information

Section 2 Access

- Share state-specific regulations regarding residents of nursing facilities and/or residential care communities right to access the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program (LTCOP).
- Include state-specific policies and procedures regarding Ombudsman program access to residents' medical, social, administrative, and other records, including the requirements and steps to obtain consent to access resident records, even when a resident is unable to communicate informed consent and has no resident representative.
- Include state-specific policies and procedures regarding LTCOP access to facilities after regular visiting hours and any other time when access may be required by the circumstances to be investigated.
- Include state-specific policies and procedures regarding LTCOP access to residents.
- Include state-specific policies and procedures about LTCOP access to facility records, including administrative records, policies, and documents, to which the residents and public have access. If applicable, provide information about state laws that may provide additional access than what federal requirements provide.
- Include state-specific policies and procedures on what to do when access is impeded or denied.
- Add state laws, regulations, or policies pertaining to willful interference and any other penalty information.

Section 3 Confidentiality and Disclosure

- Include state-specific policies and procedures related to confidentiality.

- Include state-specific policies and procedures on disclosure of resident information and program records, including required steps to disclose the information and records.
- Include state-specific policies and procedures for when a resident is unable to communicate informed consent to disclose information and the LTCOP believes that an action, inaction, or decision may adversely affect the health, safety, welfare, or rights of the resident. Include steps when the resident has a representative who is not acting in the best interest of the resident, and when the resident does not have a representative.

Section 4 Communication Strategies

- Insert state-specific policies and resources related to the use of interpreters and auxiliary aids.

Section 1:

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome

Trainer's Note: Allow at least 15 minutes for Section 1.

Begin the session by welcoming the trainees to the training session and thanking them for their continued interest in the program. Make sure everyone introduces themselves – even if they come late.

To begin please share:

- Your name
- Where you are from
- One thing you learned from Module 4 - something that really stuck with you or surprised you
- What you hope to learn since the last module

After introductions, thank the trainees for their information and explain any housekeeping items that need to be addressed including the time frame of the training day, breaks, location of restrooms, refreshments, etc. Ask the trainees to speak up if they have any questions throughout the training.

Welcome to Module 5 of certification training **Access and Communication**. Thank you for being here to learn more about the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program and the certification process.

Module 5 Agenda

Trainer's Note: The timeframes for each Section are approximate. Allow at least 2.5 hours for Module 5.

- Section 1: Welcome and Introduction (15 minutes)
Section 2: Access (45 minutes)
BREAK (5-10 minutes)
Section 3: Confidentiality and Disclosure of Ombudsman Program Information (30 minutes)
BREAK (5-10 minutes)
Section 4: Communication Strategies (45 minutes)
Section 5: Conclusion (15 minutes)

Module 5 Learning Objectives

Trainer's Note: Go over the Module 5 learning objectives.

After completion of Module 5 you will understand:

- Ombudsman program authority to access
 - long-term care facilities
 - residents
 - records
- What to do when access is denied
- What information you can and cannot disclose
- Communication strategies

Module 5 Key Words and Terms

The key words and terms are defined relative to Ombudsman program practices and are found throughout this Module. Take a moment to familiarize yourself with this important information.

Auxiliary Aids and Services – Accommodations such as interpreters, items, equipment, or services that assist with effective communication.

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) – A division within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CMS administers the nation’s major healthcare programs including Medicare and Medicaid.

Complainant – An individual who requests Ombudsman program complaint investigation services regarding one or more complaints made by, or on behalf of, residents.¹

Confidentiality – Federal and state laws mandate that the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program keep all identifying information about a resident and a complainant private, within the Ombudsman program.

Disclose – To make known or public; to expose to view.²

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA, Privacy Rule) – A federal law that required the creation of national standards to protect patient health information from being disclosed without the patient’s consent or knowledge. HIPAA sets rules and limits on who can use, review, and disclose individuals’ health information.³

Incident Report (Accident Report) – A document that records details when an unexpected event occurs, such as an accident, injury to a resident or staff, or potential abuse.

Informed Consent - The permission from a resident or a resident representative after an explanation has been given of the facts, options, and possible outcomes of such options in a manner and language in which the resident or resident representative understands.

Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (Office, OSLTCO) – As used in sections 711 and 712 of the Act, means the organizational unit in a State or territory which is headed by a State Long-Term Care Ombudsman.⁴

¹ https://tcombudsman.org/omb_support/nors

² Merriam-Webster <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disclose>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). <https://www.cdc.gov/php/publications/topic/hipaa.html>

⁴ 45 CFR Part 1324 Subpart A §1324.1 Definitions Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs Final Rule

Ombudsman – A Swedish word meaning agent, representative, or someone who speaks on behalf of another. For the purposes of this manual, the word “Ombudsman” means the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman.

Representatives of the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

(Representatives) - As used in sections 711 and 712 of the Act, means the employees or volunteers designated by the Ombudsman to fulfill the duties set forth in §1324.19(a), whether personnel supervision is provided by the Ombudsman or his or her designees or by an agency hosting a local Ombudsman entity designated by the Ombudsman pursuant to section 712(a)(5) of the Act.⁵

Residential Care Community (RCC) – A type of long-term care facility as described in the Older Americans Act (Act) that, regardless of setting, provides at a minimum, room and board, around-the-clock on-site supervision, and help with personal care such as bathing and dressing or health-related services such as medication management. Facility types include but are not limited to assisted living; board and care homes; congregate care; enriched housing programs; homes for the aged; personal care homes; adult foster/ family homes and shared housing establishments that are licensed, registered, listed, certified, or otherwise regulated by a state.⁶

Skilled Nursing Facility or Nursing Facility – Also known as a “nursing home,” is a certified facility that provides skilled nursing care for residents who require medical or nursing care rehabilitation or provides health-related care and services to individuals who, because of their mental or physical condition, require care and services (above the level of room and board) which can be made available to them only through institutional facilities.⁷ For the purposes of this training and to be consistent with the National Ombudsman Reporting System (NORS), we use the term “nursing facility” for both skilled nursing facilities and nursing facilities.⁸

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (Ombudsman, State Ombudsman) – As used in sections 711 and 712 of the Act, means the individual who heads the Office and is responsible personally, or through representatives of the Office, to fulfill the functions, responsibilities, and duties set forth in §1324.13 and §1324.19.

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (Long-Term Care Ombudsman program, the program, LTCOP) – As used in sections 711 and 712 of the Act, means the program through which the functions and duties of the Office are carried out,

⁵ 45 CFR Part 1324 Subpart A § 1324.1 Definitions Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs Final Rule

⁶ CA-04 02 Residential Care Community Table 1 Part C Case and Complaint Definitions
https://ltombudsman.org/uploads/files/support/NORS_Table_1_Case_Level_10-31-2024.pdf

⁷ This definition is a combination of Requirements for, and assuring Quality of Care in, Skilled Nursing Facilities, Section 1819(a) of the Social Security Act [42 U.S.C. 1395i-3(a)]
https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title18/1819.htm and Requirements for Nursing Facilities, Section 1919(a) of the Social Security Act [42 U.S.C. 1396r(a)] https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title19/1919.htm

⁸ NORS Table 1 https://ltombudsman.org/uploads/files/support/NORS_Table_1_Case_Level_10-31-2024.pdf

consisting of the Ombudsman, the Office headed by the Ombudsman, and the representatives of the Office.⁹

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs Rule (LTCOP Rule) – The Federal Rule that governs the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program (45 CFR Part 1324).¹⁰

Subsection Symbol (§) – The subsection symbol is used to signify an individual numeric statute or regulation (rule).

Willful Interference – Actions or inactions taken by an individual in an attempt to intentionally prevent, interfere with, or attempt to impede the Ombudsman from performing any of the functions or responsibilities set forth in §1324.13 or the Ombudsman or a representative of the Office from performing any of the duties set forth in §1324.19.¹¹

⁹ 45 CFR Part 1324 Subpart A §1324.1 Definitions Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs Final Rule

¹⁰ <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-B/chapter-XIII/subchapter-C/part-1324>

¹¹ 45 CFR Part 1324 Subpart A §1324.1 Definitions Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs Final Rule

Section 2:

Access

Trainer's Note: Allow at least 45 minutes for Section 2.

*Clarify that access refers to the resident's access to the Ombudsman program **and** the LTCOP's access to residents, facilities, and records. Residents have the right to access. LTCOP has the authority to access.*

What Does Access Mean and Why Is It Important?

In this section, access is described in two different manners. Access applies to both the **residents' rights** to contact the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program (LTCOP) and speak in-person with a representative of the Office (representative) during a facility visit, **and it applies** to the **Ombudsman program's authority** to access residents, facilities, and records.

Residents have the **right** to access. The LTCOP has the **authority** to access.

Access is crucial when conducting the functions and duties of the Ombudsman program, such as complaint investigation and resolution, as discussed in Module 1 and determined in the LTCOP Rule. Access allows representatives to hear from residents about their experiences, to provide information and assistance, and to let residents know they have an advocate if or when needed.

Access may be difficult when the facility lacks communication devices such as cell phones, computers, or other electronic devices to assist residents in communicating with the LTCOP, as well as family and friends.

Regulations Pertaining to Residents' Right to Access the Ombudsman Program

→ **Share state-specific regulations regarding residents of nursing facilities and/or residential care communities right to access the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program (LTCOP).**

Federal and/or state laws and regulations ensure that residents in nursing facilities and other residential care communities have access to the Ombudsman program. Nursing facility residents' rights to access the LTCOP are addressed in the [federal nursing facilities regulations](#).¹²

Facilities must:

- Provide immediate access to any resident by a representative of the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (the Office)

¹² CFR 42 Chapter IV Subchapter G Part 483 Requirements for States and Long Term Care Facilities Subpart B – Requirements for Long Term Care Facilities <https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=f64b6edcc2b2ee52bf5de8e19a340569&mc=true&node=sp42.5.483.b&rqn=div6>

- Allow representatives of the Office to examine a resident’s medical, social, and administrative records¹³
- Not prohibit or discourage a resident from communicating with a representative of the Office

Trainer’s Note: Denial of access and interference is discussed later in this Module.

Authority of the Ombudsman Program to Access Long-Term Care Facilities, Residents, and Records

The authority of the Ombudsman program to access long-term care facilities, residents, and records is defined in the [Older Americans Act](#) (OAA)¹⁴ and the [LTCOP Rule](#).¹⁵ State laws and regulations also ensure the LTCOP has access to residents in long-term care facilities. The OAA states that access to residents and facilities shall be private and unimpeded, provides conditions when access to records is appropriate, and instructs states to have procedures related to access.

The LTCOP Rule expands upon the OAA and states that representatives of the Office have authority to:

- Enter nursing facilities and residential care communities at any time during a facility’s regular business hours or regular visiting hours, and at any other time when access may be required by the circumstances to be investigated
- Trainer’s Note: Reinforce that representatives cannot be denied access to the facility or residents outside of visiting hours (just like any other visitor).*
- Access all residents
 - Access the name and contact information of the resident representative, if any, where needed to perform the Ombudsman representatives’ functions and duties
 - Review medical, social, administrative, and other records relating to the resident when specific factors apply
 - Access long-term care facility administrative records, policies, and documents, to which the residents or the public have access

The State Ombudsman has authority to access, and, upon request, obtain copies of all licensing and certification records maintained by the State with respect to long-term care facilities.

¹³ Social records may include information from social services, activities, and non-medical information. Administrative records may include financial records, admissions records, etc.

¹⁴ Older Americans Act <https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/about-acl/2020-04/Older%20Americans%20Act%20Of%201965%20as%20amended%20by%20Public%20Law%20116-131%20on%203-25-2020.pdf>

¹⁵ CFR 45 Part 1324 Allotments for Vulnerable Elder Rights Protection Activities Subpart A – State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-B/chapter-XIII/subchapter-C/part-1324>

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) – sometimes referred to as the Privacy Rule - is a federal law that sets rules and limits on who can look at and receive an individual's health information. Under HIPAA, the Ombudsman program is considered a "health oversight agency." As such, nursing facilities and other long-term care facilities may, in response to appropriate Ombudsman program requests, share other information without fear of violating the Privacy Rule. Such information includes, but is not limited to, residents' medical, social, or other records; a list of resident names and room numbers; and the name and contact information of resident representatives. **As noted above, access to records must be consistent with the LTCOP policies and procedures in accordance with the OAA and the LTCOP Rule.**

What if facility staff say they can't share information with me due to HIPAA?

Politely explain that the LTCOP is considered to be a health oversight agency.

If staff still do not provide the requested information, ask to speak to the staff person's supervisor.

If the facility refuses to provide the requested information because they believe they will be in violation of HIPAA, contact your supervisor or the state Office for further direction.

Access to Resident Records

It is not always necessary to review resident records during an investigation. Representatives use other investigatory tools (e.g., interviews and observation) and often find it is not necessary to review records. If you do access resident records, make sure to document the reason (e.g., a care complaint that requires review of the care plan), use your program's consent form (if applicable), and be prepared to share that information with your supervisor and the Ombudsman.

Authority to access records

The LTCOP's authority to access resident records comes from the OAA Sec 712 (b). Additional clarification on accessing records is included in the LTCOP Rule 1324.11 (e)(2). In addition, all LTCOPs are required to have policies and procedures on accessing records.

The Ombudsman program only accesses records when necessary to investigate a complaint. According to the OAA, representatives must have access to resident records if:

- The representative of the Office has permission of the resident or the resident representative, or
- The resident is unable to communicate consent to the review and has no resident representative, and the

representative of the Office obtains the approval of the Ombudsman;

or

- Access is necessary to investigate a complaint and: the resident representative refuses permission to consent to the access; a representative of the Office has reasonable cause to believe that the resident representative is not acting in the best interests of the resident; **and** the representative of the Office obtains the approval of the State Ombudsman.

→ **Include state-specific policies and procedures regarding Ombudsman program access to residents' medical, social, administrative, and other records, including the requirements and steps to obtain consent to access resident records, and when a resident is unable to communicate informed consent and has no resident representative.**

*Access is discussed in more detail during Module 6. Use the information in Figure 1 as an introduction to the topic to explain **when/why** resident records would be accessed. **How** to review them is discussed in Module 6. The paragraph below explains the process to obtain informed consent to review a resident's record.*

According to the LTCOP Rule:

- *the resident or resident representative communicates informed consent, **and***
 - *the consent is given in writing, verbally or using auxiliary aids and services (i.e., accommodations that assist with communication) **and***
 - *when verbal or by other means, consent is documented at the time or shortly after consent is given;*
- *access is necessary to investigate a complaint, the resident's representative refuses to consent to the access, **and***
 - *the LTCOP has reasonable cause to believe the resident representative is not acting in the best interests of the resident, **and***
 - *the representative of the Office obtains approval from the State Ombudsman.*

If there is no resident representative and the resident cannot communicate informed consent, follow program policies and procedures for accessing records.

THE PROCESS TO OBTAIN INFORMED CONSENT TO REVIEW A RESIDENT'S RECORD

Figure 1¹⁶

Informed consent must...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Come from a resident or resident representative and • Be given in writing, orally, visually, or through auxiliary aids and services
Consent is documented...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per LTCOP policies (e.g., form or case notes) • At the time the consent is given and • In the LTCOP's resident case file.
Access to records is necessary to investigate the complaint and the resident is unable to communicate informed consent and ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The resident representative refuses to consent and • The LTCOP has reasonable cause to believe the resident representative is not acting in the best interests of the resident and • Approval is obtained from the Ombudsman.
Access to records is necessary to investigate the complaint and ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The resident is unable to communicate informed consent and has no resident representative then follow your program's policies and procedures

If access is necessary to investigate a complaint and the resident cannot communicate informed consent - what do you do?

Obtain consent from the resident representative.

What if the resident representative says no?

If the LTCOP has reasonable cause to believe the resident representative is not acting in the best interests of the resident, and the representative of the Office obtains approval from the Ombudsman – then the LTCOP may access the resident's records.

¹⁶ 45 CFR Part 1324 Subpart A §1324.11 (e)(2) and Older Americans Act, Section 712(b)

In summary, you must have informed consent from the resident, or the resident representative when the resident is unable to communicate informed consent, or the approval from the Ombudsman to access the residents' records. If there is no resident representative and the resident cannot communicate informed consent, the program may access the records in accordance with the program policies and procedures. In all circumstances, follow your state program's policies and procedures.

Access to Other Records

Consent is not required for the Ombudsman program to access facility administrative records and documents that are available to residents and the public, which can include:

- Activity calendar
- Current state survey/inspection results
- Facility admission contract
- Facility policies, especially those related to residents' rights
- Menus
- Number of staff per shift

A list of names and room numbers of residents is a confidential document that the LTCOP has authority to access. Because it contains resident-identifying information it cannot be shared outside of the Ombudsman program. Follow program policies and procedures for keeping resident information confidential.

The LTCOP also has access to the list of resident names and room numbers (i.e., resident roster or resident census).

State Ombudsman Program Policies and Procedures to Access

As per the LTCOP Rule, the State Ombudsman is required to develop policies and procedures that include timeframes for access to facilities, residents, and appropriate records.

- *Include state-specific policies and procedures regarding LTCOP access to facilities after regular visiting hours and any other time when access may be required by the circumstances to be investigated.*
- *Include state-specific policies and procedures regarding LTCOP access to residents.*
- *Include state-specific policies and procedures about LTCOP access to facility records, including administrative records, policies, and documents, to which the residents and the public have access. If applicable, provide information about state laws that may provide additional access than what federal requirements provide.*

Information not Required to be Shared

Trainer's Note: Share program examples of when the LTCOP requested information that the facility is not required to provide. If your state law provides additional access to facility information (e.g., incident reports, staffing records) review that information and your state process to access the information.

The LTCOP does not have access to all records and documentation maintained by the facility. Information the facility does not have to share with the Ombudsman program includes but is not limited to:

- Incident reports
- Personnel information on facility staff such as resumes, application information, etc.
- Non-public financial information

When the Facility Interferes with, or Denies, Access

→ *Include state-specific policies and procedures on what to do when access is impeded or denied.*

→ *Add state laws, regulations, or policies pertaining to willful interference and any other penalty information.*

Trainer's Note: Share program examples of when access has been impeded or denied.

Interference

There are several ways in which facility staff may attempt to restrict the Ombudsman program's access to residents and residents' records. Some actions are subtle, and some actions are more obvious.

For example, facility staff might:

- Come in and out of the room during a visit
- Linger outside of the room during a visit
- Suggest walking around the facility with you and/or ask who you are visiting
- Ask about all concerns brought up during the visit
- Tell residents not to share information with you
- Purposefully schedule conflicts to prevent a resident from visiting with you
- Agree to give you the requested records or information, but never do
- Give you only part of the requested records

On their own, not all actions listed above are always considered interference. For example, staff coming in and out of the room or asking about concerns brought up during the visit may not be intended to interfere. Sometimes facility staff do not understand the authority of the LTCOP, do not know who you are, or are simply

attempting to be helpful. However, when those actions are meant to intentionally impede the LTCOP, it becomes **willful interference** (see sidebar).

In whatever form the interference occurs, it is important to take the opportunity to talk to staff and explain to them your role, your authority to visit with the resident privately, and the resident's right to meet with a representative of the Office.

Denied Access

When access to the facility or to a resident is denied, at the time of denial, ask the person for the reasoning behind the decision. There may be a reasonable cause for the denial. For example, during an infectious disease outbreak, the LTCOP may be asked to temporarily refrain from visiting the building. When such situations arise, follow your program's policies and procedures.

If you are denied a visit with a resident because the resident is receiving care, or the resident is bathing, these are reasonable explanations. Plan to come back at a more convenient time for the resident. Be respectful of the resident's schedule and privacy and do not interfere with resident activities or care.

There are times, however, when access to a facility or a resident is denied, and the restriction is not reasonable and is a violation of residents' rights and the Ombudsman program authority.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- A family member denies access to a resident who wants to visit with a representative
- Staff denies access at the direction of the resident's guardian, or staff believe that because the resident has a guardian, that access is limited
- The provider does not answer the door or the phone
- Staff denies access to the building saying the residents get "too worked up" when the representative visits and explains residents' rights

Willful Interference

Actions or inactions taken by an individual in an attempt to intentionally prevent, interfere with, or attempt to impede the Ombudsman from performing any of the functions or responsibilities, or a representative of the Office from performing any duties.



Activity

Role-Play

Trainer's Note: Conduct as a role-play, considering the questions below – provide multiple opportunities or different groups of 2 to demonstrate the situation. Or conduct as a large group discussion.

Please use your own examples and share the outcomes of the denial of access with the trainees.

1. The Ombudsman program receives a phone message from a resident named Brian saying he is being evicted in three days. Brian asks that someone call him back on the facility phone before coming to see him. When the representative tries to contact Brian, the staff refuse to take the phone to him.
 - a. What would you say to the staff person on the phone?
 - b. Who else might you speak to at the facility?
 - c. At what point do you visit the facility?

Trainer's Note: *Responses may include:*

- a. *Why isn't the resident able to come to the phone? Is there a problem? Please transfer me to your supervisor.*
 - b. *The charge nurse, Director of Nursing (DON), or the Administrator, perhaps the Social Services Director.*
 - c. *Speak with your supervisor about the facility's actions, develop a plan of action, then visit the facility. Once at the facility, visit the resident when no staff are around, talk to the resident about the failed attempts to call and if there is an alternate way to communicate in the future.*
2. Sonya, the Social Services Director, asks the representative to leave the facility because they are "riling up residents" by explaining their rights.
 - a. How would you respond to Sonya?
 - b. Who else might you speak to at the facility?
 - c. How do you respond to residents?
 - d. At what point do you leave?
 - e. What do you do next?

Trainer's Note: *Make sure you tell the trainees to follow the policies and procedures when access to residents is being denied. Responses may include:*

- a. *Maintain a calm and professional demeanor. Do not argue. Inform Sonya about residents' rights and the authority of the Ombudsman program to access residents. Give her a program brochure that includes information about residents' rights and the LTCOP. Offer to send additional information on residents' rights and the Ombudsman program. Let her know if she still has concerns, you could go with her to talk with the Administrator.*

- b. The Administrator. May consider calling your supervisor or State Ombudsman for direction.*
 - c. Explain to the residents that there is some confusion, and you will work it out with the facility. Reassure residents and let them know that you will be back or will stay to address their questions and concerns.*
 - d. Leave if/when feeling threatened, if your presence is having a negative effect on residents, or when told to leave by your supervisor.*
 - e. Immediately notify your supervisor, document the occurrence, and follow all requirements in the program's policies and procedures for when access is denied.*
3. During your visit, you notice a facility staff member following you around. What would you say to the staff member?

Responses may include:

- *Ask if the staff member has a question or concern.*
- *Explain the authority of the LTCOP to unimpeded access to residents.*
- *Politely ask them not to follow you on your visits.*
- *If the staff member protests, don't argue. Talk to the person in charge. After the visit, inform your supervisor of the occurrence.*

Section 3:

Confidentiality and Disclosure of Ombudsman Program Information

Trainer's Note: Allow at least 30 minutes for Section 3. Documentation is discussed in detail during Module 9.

Access allows you to gather information through observations, interviews, and record reviews. It is important to have a system to document your initial findings. Most representatives take notes during their visit or phone calls via pen and paper or an electronic device. Others take notes immediately after. The notes taken will be entered into an electronic-based system managed by the Office. Requirements for documentation are discussed in more detail during Module 10.

Confidentiality

It is essential to recognize what information gathered is confidential. All records and information obtained by the LTCOP during conversations with residents and complainants must be held in confidence. It is important to explain to residents and complainants that the information they share with the program is confidential, meaning the information will not be shared (disclosed) with anyone outside of the Ombudsman program without their permission. In addition to federal guidance, always follow the program policies and procedures for confidentiality and disclosure of program information.

As a representative, you must maintain confidentiality by:

- Not identifying residents or complainants without their consent
- Not disclosing any information about a resident or complainant
- Explaining your program's confidentiality and disclosure requirements to facility staff and others who may expect or request confidential program information

The OAA and the LTCOP Rule have strict parameters for protecting the confidentiality of the identity of residents and complainants, resident records, program records, and other information.

→ **Include state-specific policies and procedures related to confidentiality.**

Why is confidentiality important?

Confidential conversations with the LTCOP allow residents and complainants a level of comfort when discussing concerns. When the resident and complainant understand that the information cannot be shared with anyone without their approval, it encourages them to be open about details of their complaints. Maintaining confidentiality is the best way for the Ombudsman program to earn and keep the trust of residents and ensure that actions are resident-directed.

When a complainant is not the resident, the Ombudsman program:

- Cannot disclose the identity without their permission
- Must have the resident's permission to report back to the complainant

- Is required to honor both the resident's and the complainant's rights to confidentiality

What information is not confidential?

Trainer's Note: Information about visits and observations will be discussed in more detail during Module 6. The point of providing this information is to let the trainees know that some information can be shared with facility staff so long as the information does not violate confidentiality and disclosure requirements.

General observations identified about the facility that do not identify any resident or complainant in any way can be shared with facility staff.

Such observations include but are not limited to:

- Cleanliness of the facility
- Cluttered hallways that restrict residents and/or staff
- Odors
- Visible safety hazards



Confidential or Not Confidential?

Trainer's Note: Ask the following questions and make sure the appropriate answers are discussed.

Review the following scenarios and indicate if the information gathered is confidential or not and whether the information should or should not be shared.

1. You tell the housekeeping supervisor that you noticed the garbage cans in several residents' rooms on Hallway A are overflowing.

Answer: This information is not confidential and is okay to share with facility staff. It is based on your observations and does not identify any specific resident.

2. You observe Mildred's call light has been left unanswered for 20 minutes. Before you talk to Mildred, you see a CNA and tell them what you observed.

Answer: This information is confidential. Because the concern directly impacts Mildred, it is not okay to share the information with facility staff without Mildred's permission. You should first talk to Mildred to see if she wants assistance from the LTCOP. During observations and interviews, you should also check to see if other residents have an issue with their call lights being answered in a timely manner. If so, you could talk to facility staff about "several resident complaints" about call lights. You can only use the name of a resident with their permission.

3. You tell the charge nurse about a strong feces/urine odor on the 2nd floor.

Answer: *This information is not confidential and is okay to share with facility staff.*

4. You visit Darla after her son calls you about a family conflict over moving Darla to another facility. Darla tells you her son is causing problems and she is considering moving in with her daughter, not another facility. Darla said her doctor and other family members are against her moving in with her daughter, but she wants to do it regardless of what they say. You forgot to ask her if you can tell her son about her plan. Her son calls you the next day and asks you about your visit with his mother. You are worried about Darla's safety, so you tell him about the plan to move back into the community.

Answer: *This information is confidential. You did not receive permission to share the information with the complainant. Therefore, it should not be shared until or unless permission is granted.*

Confidentiality Dos & Don'ts

Confidentiality applies to all records and communications including verbal, non-verbal (includes sign language), observations, and written (e.g., letters, emails, texts, etc.).

Do

Respect the resident as the "client" and take direction from them regardless of who files the complaint.

Follow the direction of the resident representative when the resident cannot communicate informed consent and is acting in the best interest of the resident or if the resident gives you permission to follow the direction of their representative.

Keep the identity of the resident and the complainant confidential.

Don't

Reveal information to anyone without permission from the resident.

Tell facility staff who you are visiting.

Read a resident's chart that is offered to you by a facility staff member without the resident's consent or attempt to access a resident's chart without the consent of the resident or the resident representative.

Reveal the identity of the complainant or the resident without permission.

Show program records to anyone outside of the LTCOP.

Allow staff to follow you on your visits.

Disclosure of Resident and Complainant Information

Disclosure of information simply means the releasing of information either verbally or in writing. Details of when and why to disclose resident or complainant identifying information will be explored further in the complaint-handling Modules. Quite often some kind of disclosure of resident information is required to resolve a complaint.

Regardless of where the Ombudsman program is located, all files, records, and information maintained by representatives of the Office pertaining to program activities and complaints are the property of the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman. Such information is not the property of the individual representatives nor the local Ombudsman entity (LOE).

Disclosure of such information, including identifying information about a resident or a complainant may only occur under the following circumstances and as determined by the State Ombudsman in their program's policies and procedures:

- Permission from the resident (or a resident's representative when applicable)
 - Permission from the complainant
 - An order from the court

Court Order

A directive issued by a court, or a judge requiring a person to do or not do something. Instruct trainees to contact the State Ombudsman and follow program policies and procedures if they receive a court order and explain relevant policies and procedures.

The OAA and the LTCOP Rule require all disclosure of files, records, and other information maintained by the Ombudsman program to be determined by the Ombudsman and included in LTCOP policies and procedures. These policies and procedures give guidance on how to disclose resident or complainant identifying information.

Otherwise, disclosure of files, records, and information maintained by the LTCOP pertaining to program activities and complaints is prohibited.

When might the Ombudsman program disclose resident or complainant identifying information, and for what purpose?

Some common reasons for disclosure include:

- To resolve a complaint with facility staff
- To refer a complaint to an outside agency
- To discuss resident concerns with their representative or other family or friends

Disclosure will be further reviewed during the complaint processing sections.



Learn more about the disclosure provisions in the [OAA](#)¹⁷ and the [LTCOP Rule](#).¹⁸

- ***Include state-specific policies and procedures on disclosure of resident information and program records, including required steps to disclose the information and records.***
- ***Include state-specific policies and procedures for when a resident is unable to communicate informed consent to disclose information and the LTCOP believes that an action, inaction, or decision may adversely affect the health, safety, welfare, or rights of the resident. Include steps when the resident has a representative who is not acting in the best interest of the resident, and when the resident does not have a representative.***

Trainer's Note: Clarify your program's policies and procedures on disclosure and let the trainees know when and how they are required to notify the Office when they receive a request to disclose information or records.



Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information: What Would You Do?

Trainer's Note: Ask the trainees the following questions and make sure the appropriate answer is covered.

1. Lisa, a representative of the Office, goes to Mrs. Jones's room to follow up on a complaint, but she is not there. Lisa asks the social worker where to find Mrs. Jones because her daughter called the Office with a concern.

Did Lisa breach confidentiality? If so, how should Lisa have handled this situation?

Trainer's Note: Yes, Lisa breached confidentiality. Lisa should visit with other residents, then go back to Mrs. Jones's room. If she still isn't there, casually ask her roommate if she knows the whereabouts of Mrs. Jones. Do not tell staff or anyone that you are responding to a complaint. You may have to go back to the facility at another time. Follow up with the resident's daughter to see if there is a better time to attempt a visit.

¹⁷ <https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/about-acl/2020-04/Older%20Americans%20Act%20of%201965%20as%20amended%20by%20Public%20Law%20116-131%20on%203-25-2020.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-B/chapter-XIII/subchapter-C/part-1324>

2. A local law enforcement officer calls the Ombudsman program and asks if the representative knows anything about a resident named Daniel Johnson. Kari, the representative, knows Daniel well. They have had conversations about his family's management of his money, but he has not asked Kari to act on his concerns. Relieved the police are investigating, Kari tells the Officer about her concerns and offers to send her case notes to him.

Did Kari follow program requirements for disclosure of information? If not, what should she have done?

Trainer's Note: No, Kari did not follow the requirements. She did not have permission to disclose information from the resident or from the State Ombudsman. Instead, Kari could have asked the officer for his contact information and told him she could not indicate whether she was aware of Daniel Johnson or the concerns surrounding the information shared by the officer. Kari could then say that someone from the program will follow-up with him after they spoke with the resident. Then Kari should contact the resident and follow program policies and procedures regarding consent and disclosure of information.

3. Jane is a representative of the Office. A law firm serves her with a subpoena at her home. The subpoena asks for the dates of visits to "Caring Touch" personal care home, the names of the residents and staff that she spoke to, and for her impressions of the home.

What would you do?

Trainer's Note: For Ombudsman program purposes, a subpoena issued by someone other than a judge, such as a court clerk or an attorney in a case, is different from a court order.

You should contact your supervisor and give them the subpoena. Do not share or acknowledge that you visited "Caring Touch." Your supervisor should review all activity and alert the State Ombudsman for follow-up.

Section 4:

Communication Strategies

Trainer's Note: Allow at least 45 minutes for Section 4.

Communication

Communication is the act of exchanging ideas, knowledge, information, and sharing personal experiences. Regular and timely access to long-term care facilities and residents is essential for Ombudsman program communication with residents, resident representatives, family members, visitors, and facility staff. The way you speak to and listen to an individual builds trust and meaningful connection, which is an important part of complaint intake and investigation, specifically discussed in Module 6.

Trainer's Note: Show the video, *Residents Speak Out: Resident's Rights*, then facilitate a discussion about communication from the resident's perspective. Ask the trainees the questions below.



Watch the video [Residents Speak Out: Resident's Rights](#).¹⁹

- What are your thoughts on the video?
- What are some common themes related to communication?

Trainer's Note: Responses may include residents express wanting to be engaged and spoken to as a person, not just a "room number," and residents indicate wanting someone to pay attention to them and value them. Tell the trainees to keep the video in mind as this section on communication is discussed.

Effective communication is a two-way process of how information is provided and received.²⁰ Both verbal and non-verbal communication contributes to how one interprets information. Word choice, tone of voice, and body language all contribute to successful communication.

From a total of 100%, the following is true of how information is communicated.

Trainer's Note: Ask trainees from a total of 100% what percentages they think words or speech, tone of voice, and body language is communicated. The answers are below.

- 10% is communication through words or speech.
- 40% is communication through our tone of voice.
- 50% is communication through body language.

¹⁹ MedSchool Maryland Productions <https://youtu.be/NbpvWaKTD80>

²⁰ <https://theinvestorsbook.com/effective-communication.html>

Words or Speech

The words you choose and how you say them set the stage for building relationships. It is common for family members to contact you because someone has told them, “The Ombudsman program can help.” Most have no idea about LTCOP responsibilities and what representatives can and cannot do, so it is critical to provide them with a clear understanding of your role right from the very beginning. Family members may expect you to share all information gathered and may request your follow-up on their concerns. Take particular care to explain that the resident is your client, not them.

Here are some possible responses you can use:

- “The resident - your mother- is our client and we’re going to do the best we can for her.”
- “I am a resident advocate. I am here for your mother and what she needs, and hopefully we can all work together on this.”

As opposed to saying:

- “I work for the resident, not the family.”
- “I can’t tell you anything about my visit with the resident.”

Another common situation you may encounter is when the complainant tells you the resident has dementia so there is no point in speaking with them.

Here are some responses you can use:

Trainer’s Note: *Meeting face to face or in-person visits may not be possible in all circumstances. Communication with the resident may take different forms. If this is the case in your area, please indicate as such.*

- “Please understand that I am required to meet with the resident face to face.”
- “I will go and see the resident and talk with them about this. Then, we can see where we’ll go from there.”
- “I understand what you are saying, but my obligation is to go and speak with the resident first. It’s important that I see for myself.”

As opposed to saying:

- “Regardless of what you say, I have to talk to the resident.”
- “Thanks for the information, but I need to find out for myself.”

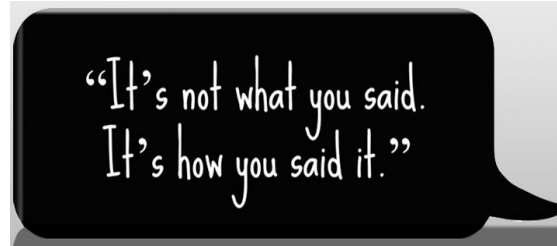
Tone of Voice

Trainer’s Note: *The PowerPoint slide has the sentence “I didn’t say that.” Ask trainees to volunteer to read the sentence and emphasize one word in the sentence. Make sure all words in the sentence have been individually emphasized. Ask the trainees the intent of the varying messages. The trainer should then very loudly and angrily read the sentence. Ask the trainees the intent of the sentence now.*

Your tone of voice impacts how a message is heard. Emphasizing a specific word in a sentence can result in different interpretations of the intent of your message.

For example, the following statements have different meaning, depending on which word is emphasized.

- “I didn’t say that.”
- “I **didn’t** say that.”
- “I didn’t **say** that.”
- “I didn’t say **that**.”
- “I **didn’t say** that.”



Body Language

Body language speaks volumes. Be aware of the impact your non-verbal cues have on those with whom you are speaking. There are many ways to effectively communicate without using words, such as:

- Positioning yourself at the resident’s eye level
- Leaning forward when listening
- Facing the person
- Nodding your head
- Relaxing and acting natural
- Using positive facial expressions (e.g., smiling as opposed to frowning)
- Waiting through pauses
- Listening without interrupting



Try not to:

- Cross your arms in front of your body
- Check your phone or divide your attention
- Tap your foot or drum your fingers
- Use negative facial expressions

Trainer’s Note: Ask the trainees for examples of how they show others they are interested in what is being said and are listening to the individual.

The responses may include verbal or nonverbal such as:

- Making sure I’m at eye level with the person
- Tilting my head
- Looking directly at the person and not looking around as they are talking
- Saying “what you are telling me is important” and “I’d like to hear more about...”

Words Matter: Conveying Your Message

Effective communication is more than just relaying your ideas, knowledge, and experience. There are other factors involved that influence how information is received and understood. In addition, you may use different communication approaches depending on the individual receiving the message (e.g., a resident, family member, staff person, etc.).

Whether you are communicating verbally, in writing, or using another means, there are several elements to consider when communicating your message.

To avoid confusion and misunderstandings, don't:

- Use technical terms, acronyms, vague words, and slang
- Relay conflicting messages
- Use a language that is not understood by the recipient
- Include too much information

To maximize the chance for successful communication, consider the following:

- **Is your message clear?** Use simple and easy-to-understand language.
- **Is your message factually correct?** Ensure information is not vague, subject to interpretation, or false.
- **Is your message complete?** Include all relevant information, particularly if it is the basis for decision-making.
- **Is your message precise?** Provide straightforward and concise information to avoid incorrect interpretations of the message.
- **Are you professional and respectful in your message?** Deliver the message in a manner that is considerate of the person and sensitive to the topic at hand.
- **How do you ensure your message is received?** Consider with whom you are communicating. What is their role, knowledge of the subject, ability to understand, what mode of communication works best, and what language does the receiver understand?

***Trainer's Note:** Tell the trainees to close their manuals then read the example to them. Ask if the following scenario considers all elements just discussed when talking to Jane.*



***Optional Prework:** The answers are in the trainee manuals. If you are running short on time, you can ask the trainees to read the scenarios on their own.*



Example: Rose

Rose recently came to the facility with chronic pain and some minor memory loss. Rose tells you she has been in terrible pain and doesn't know if she gets

her pain medication like she did when she was in the hospital. Rose gives you permission to review her chart and speak with anyone in the facility who could help.

You go back to Rose and say:

“I checked your care plan and talked to the care plan coordinator who told me that you should be getting your pain meds every four hours. However, when looking at the med chart, I saw that the pain meds are being distributed PRN. The federal requirements indicate you have a right to be included in the care planning process and in your health decisions. Do you want your medication PRN or every four hours? And who do you want me to talk to about it?”

Were the elements of effective communication used when talking to Rose?

The answer is **no**. The information provided does not take into consideration Rose’s ability to understand acronyms and terms used in long-term care. The message delivered was accurate, but not concise and not delivered in a manner to allow Rose to make a good decision. PRN means “as needed.”

How would you deliver this message?

Possible response, “I checked on your concern about your pain medication and found out you are supposed to get your pain medication every four hours. The facility had the wrong information and thought you were only supposed to get your pain medication when you asked for it. I talked to the nurse, Michael, and straightened it all out. He said he will come by within the hour to talk to you and set up a schedule. I’ll follow up with Michael and will stop by again in a few days to see how you are doing.”

Listening Skills

There are techniques to use when verbally communicating with someone to indicate you are listening. Those methods include demonstrating interest, active listening, affirmation, and validation.

***Trainer’s Note:** When talking to residents, be careful not to nod or shake your head when asking a question. This can lead the resident into giving a response meant to please you instead of giving a response that reflects their true thoughts or wishes.*

Demonstrate Interest

- Use minimal responses such as, “oh,” “so,” and “I see.”
- Encourage additional information such as, “Is there more you would like to share...” and, “I’m happy to listen...”

Active Listening

- Paraphrase what is heard. For example, the resident says that he keeps telling the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) not to put his clothes on the floor; she just doesn't listen. You paraphrase by saying, "Sounds like you are not feeling heard by the CNA regarding your clothing."
- Ask open-ended questions for more details instead of closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions are questions that cannot be answered with just a "yes" or "no" response. To allow for more detailed responses, open-ended questions often start with "how," "tell me about...," and "why." Closed-ended questions lead to answers of just, "Yes," "No," or a brief piece of specific information.

Affirmation

- Restate what is heard in sentence form, such as:
 - "I hear you saying..."
 - "It sounds like..."
 - "It appears as though..."

Validation

- Acknowledge the resident's feelings, such as:
 - "It's okay to feel sad..."
 - "There is nothing wrong with being angry right now about..."

Observation

- Look for non-verbal forms of communication, such as:
 - Facial expressions
 - Eye contact, or lack thereof
 - Posture
 - Gestures

Based on your observation, what is going on in the picture? Does the medical person look as though she is listening to the individual? What would you do in this situation if you were this individual's advocate?



Example: Barry, Situation 1

During a visit with a resident named Barry, you ask him if staff treat him well. Barry tells you that most staff are nice to him. You ask him how the food is, and Barry says it's okay if you eat it in the dining room. You then ask Barry about the activities, and he replies, "What activities?" and then laughs. A CNA walks into the room and Barry immediately says to you that everything is wonderful and thanks you for stopping by. You continue asking Barry about life in the facility.

Trainer’s Note: Ask if effective communication skills for receiving information were used in the case study about Barry. Tell the trainees to close their manuals for the next part of the activity.

This activity can be conducted as a role-play or a large group discussion. If conducting as a role-play, read the first situation then have trainees role-play how to handle the conversation differently.

Did the representative listen to Barry?

How would you have handled the conversation differently?

Ask: Did the representative listen to Barry?

The answer is no. The representative did not listen to what Barry was saying and did not ask any follow-up questions to clarify his comments. The representative did not pay attention to the change in Barry when the CNA came into the room.

Ask or conduct the role-play: How would you have handled the conversation differently? Allow for trainees to give examples.

Make sure the following revised situation is discussed:



Example: Barry, Situation 2

- During a visit with a resident named Barry, you ask him if staff treat him well. Barry tells you most staff are nice to him. You ask Barry, “Most staff? Tell me more about the staff who aren’t nice.”
- You ask Barry how the food is, and he says, “It’s okay if you eat in the dining room.” You ask Barry, “Where do you prefer to eat? What do you mean, ‘if you eat in the dining room’?”
- You ask Barry about the activities, and he replies, “What activities?” and then laughs. You say, “Yes, I noticed there are just a few activities on the calendar. How do you like to spend your time (or, what are your interests)? Are there activities that you would like to see happen in the facility?”
- A CNA walks into the room and Barry immediately says to you that everything is wonderful and thanks you for stopping by. Take the cue from Barry and let him know you appreciate talking to him and end the visit. Revisit Barry at another time to address the concerns brought up during your conversation and ask Barry about his response when the CNA entered the room. Make sure there are no staff around when you meet with him the second time.

If they want your assistance, remind them how you will support them and the next steps. If they do not want to pursue the complaint immediately, reassure them that they have your support, and you will follow-up with them. Before leaving any resident that shared

concerns, continue the conversation for a few more minutes that way the conversation didn't end on a negative note potentially adding to their sense of helplessness or stress.

Communication Tips

Many of the communication tips below apply to communicating with anyone, particularly residents. However, certain tips are even more helpful when communicating with residents who have a disability or a diagnosis that may affect their ability to provide and receive information. To effectively communicate, consider the best way to communicate with each individual resident.

Individuals Living with Memory Loss

Memory loss does not always affect one's ability to communicate. Therefore, it is important not to make assumptions based on a diagnosis related to dementia or memory loss.²¹

- Approach the resident from the front and identify yourself
- Speak to the resident and not about the resident when others are in the room
- Talk to the resident face to face in a quiet space with minimal distractions
- Look at the resident and speak slowly and clearly
- Ask one question at a time
- Ask yes or no questions
- Give the resident ample time to respond to your questions
- Consider the feelings behind words or sounds
- Be respectful

There are also specific communication actions to avoid when talking to individuals who have memory loss.

Don't:

- Ask the resident if they remember you
- Argue or try to convince
- Explain reality or try to reason
- Get too physically close to the resident, invading their personal space
- Raise your voice, frown, or scold
- Use confusing language, language that could be misinterpreted as romantic (e.g., sweetie, honey), or idioms (e.g., "it's raining cats and dogs", or "are you pulling my leg?") as residents may take the words in literal form
- Take it personally if the resident doesn't remember you, doesn't want to talk, or uses offensive language

²¹ Alzheimer's Association *Communication and Alzheimer's* <https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/daily-care/communications>

Individuals Who are Blind or Visually Impaired²²

Trainer's Note: Use the PowerPoint slide with small font. Act as though the trainees can see what is on the screen and continue to train the material. If no one mentions they cannot see, ask why they did not mention it. Either way, ask the trainees how the small font affected their ability to focus and pay attention to the trainer.

- Speak to the resident when you approach them
- Face and address the resident directly
- Identify who you are and introduce anyone else with you
- Be descriptive about what you are doing
- Speak in a normal volume and natural tone
- It is okay to use words such as “blind”, “visually impaired”, “seeing”, “looking” and “watching” when speaking with someone who is visually impaired
- Don't touch or distract their service animal (if applicable)
- If documents must be read or signed, ask the resident what would be most helpful for them to see better (e.g., increased lighting, magnification, etc.)
- Ask in what format they would like to receive information (e.g., Braille, large print, audio, etc.)
- Let the resident know when you enter and leave the area and/or room

Individuals with Speech Impairments²³

- Concentrate on what the resident is saying
- Be patient – take as much time as necessary
- Don't speak for the resident or attempt to finish their sentence
- Use your regular voice tone and volume
- Ask questions which require only short answers or a nod. Consider using yes or no questions. Avoid insulting the person's intelligence with oversimplification
- If you don't understand what the resident has said, ask them to repeat themselves, or repeat back what you heard to confirm it is correct
- Don't pretend to understand when you don't
- If you have difficulty understanding the resident, consider writing or another means of communicating, but first ask the resident if this is acceptable

²² Caring for Patients Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired: A Fact Sheet for the Outpatient Care Team. Vision Center of Excellence. Walter Reed National Military Medical Center https://www.disabilityrightstn.org/documents/vce-inpatient-care-team-fact-sheet_v16_16jan15_508.pdf

²³ National League for Nursing. Communicating with People with Disabilities. <http://www.nln.org/professional-development-programs/teaching-resources/ace-d/additional-resources/communicating-with-people-with-disabilities>

Individuals Who are Deaf, Hearing Impaired, or Hard of Hearing²⁴

Trainer's Note:

If presenting the training virtually, take a piece of paper and crumple it up near the microphone (but away from the camera). Ask the trainees how the noise affected their experience when trying to learn something new.

If presenting the training in-person, do not look at the trainees and talk quietly; act distracted and rustle papers while going over the bullets below. Ask the trainees how your actions affected their experience when trying to learn something new.

- Gain the resident's attention before starting a conversation
- Look directly at the individual, face the light, speak clearly in a normal tone of voice, and keep your hands away from your face
- Use short, simple sentences
- Avoid eating or chewing gum
- If the resident uses a sign language interpreter, speak directly to the resident, not the interpreter
- If you are talking to a resident by phone, speak clearly and be prepared to repeat your questions and comments
- If you do not have access to a Text Telephone (TTY), dial 711 to reach the national telecommunications relay service, which facilitates the call between you and an individual who uses a TTY
- If you are having difficulty communicating with the resident – whether in their presence or not - ask the resident if it is acceptable to communicate via written word
- Ask the resident for their preferred form of communication (texting, email, etc.)

Individuals Who Speak Another Language

Trainer's Note: Tell the trainees that on your first visit and periodically, it is preferable to ask facility staff if there are residents who are unable to communicate in English and identify the resources staff use to communicate with such resident(s).

- Have program information available in other languages to provide to residents
- When using gestures and nonverbal cues to help the person understand, be sensitive to their reaction. Some American mannerisms – such as pointing directly at a person – may be interpreted differently in other cultures

²⁴ Communicating with Deaf Individuals. National Deaf Center. <http://www.nln.org/professional-development-programs/teaching-resources/ace-d/additional-resources/communicating-with-people-with-disabilities>

- Use a communication board or a free application on your phone
- Ask the resident if there is someone they trust to interpret
- Following your program policies and procedures, ask the facility how they communicate with the resident
- Ask if the facility has a handheld translation device, and request to use it
- Know your local resources for in-person and telephone language services
- If the options above are not sufficient, use an interpreter. When using an interpreter:
 - Explain LTCOP rules of confidentiality
 - Explain the need to translate word for word (ask them not to put statements into their own words)
 - Ask them to be neutral
 - Direct questions to the resident
 - Look at the resident, not at the interpreter, when talking



Learn more about Residents' Rights and find [Residents' Rights fact sheets](#) in other languages on the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care website.²⁵

→ Insert state-specific policies and resources related to use of interpreters and auxiliary aids.

Trainer's Note: Provide resources available in your area and how to access those services. Discuss the pros and cons of having a family member act as an interpreter. One benefit to having a family member could be that they are familiar with the resident's concerns and wishes. However, a family member might reinterpret words to suit their own perspective, the resident may not want the family member to know about the concern, etc.

Every resident is unique and may have different ways in which they communicate with others. As a representative, the key to successful communication with residents, family members, facility staff, and others is the ability to actively listen, identify the best way to connect with the individual, and clearly convey your message in a way the individual understands.

²⁵ The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care *Residents' Rights in Other Languages*
<https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/recipients/nursing-home-residents/residents-rights#Other-Languages>

Section 5:

Conclusion

Module 5 Questions

Trainer's Note: Allow approximately 15 minutes for Section 5. Ask the following questions and make sure the correct answer is discussed. These questions are meant to determine if the trainees learned the fundamental learning objectives and may illicit discussion about the answers. The questions and answers are not meant to be rushed through.

1. What information does the Ombudsman program require be kept confidential (unless given permission by the resident or complainant)?

Answer: Federal and state laws mandate that the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program keep **all** identifying information about a resident and a complainant private.

2. Name something federal law authorizes the Ombudsman program to access.

Answer(s): Residents, facilities, and medical, social, and administrative records.

3. Describe what you would do if you were denied access to a resident.

Answer: Ask why you cannot visit with the resident. Determine if the reason is valid (e.g., resident receiving care) or not valid (e.g., staff say the resident has dementia and cannot hold a conversation). Explain the authority of the Ombudsman program. Describe the rights of residents to meet with a representative. Move up the "chain of command" within the facility. Call your supervisor or the State Ombudsman. Follow program policies and procedures.

4. True or False? The representative may show their notes to the nurse if they promise not to share the information with anyone else.

Answer: False. In addition to strict federal requirements regarding disclosure of information, the Ombudsman program has specific policies and procedures about disclosure of files, records, and information maintained by the Ombudsman program.

5. When a representative receives a complaint from a family member which of the following statement(s) are true?

The representative:

- Must have the complainant's permission to be identified, whether it is identified to the resident or a staff member or someone else
- Must have the resident's permission to report back to the complainant
- Is required to honor both the resident's and the complainant's confidentiality

Answer: All are true.

6. How do you show someone you are listening to them?

Answer(s): *Nodding your head; using minimal responses such as “oh,” “so,” and, “I see;” paraphrasing what you heard; asking open-ended questions by beginning with words such as: who, what, when, where, why, how; restating what you heard in sentence form:*

- *“I hear you saying...”*
- *“It sounds like...”*
- *“It appears as though...”*

7. Name tips to use when talking to an individual with a speech impairment.

Answer(s):

- *Concentrate on what the resident is saying.*
- *Be patient. Take as much time as necessary.*
- *Don't speak for the resident or attempt to finish their sentence.*
- *Try and ask questions which require only short answers or a nod. Consider using yes or no questions.*
- *Ask the resident to repeat what was said if you do not understand, then repeat it back; don't pretend to understand.*
- *If you have difficulty understanding the resident, consider writing or another means of communicating, but first ask the resident if this is acceptable.*