



Supporting Inclusion in Long-Term Care

Why inclusion in LTC matters

People living and working in long-term care (LTC) settings need engaged teams with a variety of skills to ensure the best care and quality of life for everyone in the community. Working toward inclusion is part of promoting well-being and providing person-centred care. This means including everyone, such as unregulated team members, students (from all disciplines), family members and volunteers, as a member of the care team.

For example, teams can empower personal support workers, who have the most contact with residents on a day-to-day basis, to contribute their keen observations and knowledge of the resident during care planning and delivery. All team members should have a chance to feel included, have their voices heard and experience feelings of worth and belonging.

Diversity and the preceptor-student experience

Members of the care team are just as diverse as the resident population they provide care for. The definition of *diversity* is a wide range of characteristics and qualities within an individual, group or community.

Types of diversity include ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, ancestry, age, socio-economic status, gender identity, gender expression, physical abilities, political beliefs, religious beliefs, and other ideologies. Also, each person's needs, likes and dislikes change, so no one's diverse characteristics stay the same over time.

Intersectionality is an important type of diversity. We can use the term to describe experiencing more than one form of discrimination that becomes linked or builds off one another. An example of intersectionality is the experience of a person who:

- grew up poor.
- does not speak English as a first language.
- did not attend high school due to laws in her country of origin.

These characteristics form a whole, linked experience of diversity. Preceptors and students need to consider how diversity and intersectionality can impact their relationships and their needs. Understanding and respecting diversity among team members helps us build a supportive, inclusive and equitable environment for one another.

Click on the link to find out more about the Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovations in Long-Term Care's educational resources in support of [embracing diversity](#) in long-term care.

Supporting student inclusion

Here are some actions a preceptor can take to create an inclusive relationship with the student:

- **Empowering the student as a member of the care team.** Promoting inclusivity means making sure that *everyone* gets to participate and share their ideas - not just those who are more comfortable speaking up. A good way to help make the student's voice heard is by informing the care team before a huddle or rounds that the student will be contributing.
- **Providing a structured, dedicated time for supporting student progress and experience.** Regularly scheduled check-ins in a quiet, private area will help to create a safe space for the student to express themselves. This ensures the preceptor and student follow the agreed-upon process and meeting agreements for the clinical student placement. It also helps the preceptor focus on the student's needs for improving their learning and practice with experience.
- **Building the relationship with the student through positive communication.** An inclusive preceptor-student relationship strives to build positive communication. Recognizing and welcoming differences in communication styles helps strengthen the preceptor-student relationship by allowing the student to express themselves and by creating a safe environment to address potential conflicts or concerns early on. This may be as simple as finding out the best way to communicate (e.g., text, email, etc.), or as complex as how to address fears and anxieties about reporting on a resident issue for the larger team.

Listening to the student voice

Even with a preceptor's best efforts, not all students will feel comfortable speaking up. Power dynamics in a student's past relationships may lead to the student feeling difficult emotions, or being unable to participate in a meaningful way.

Here are some ways a preceptor can do their best to create a psychologically safe space for the student. These suggestions can also help preceptors listen more carefully to the student's voice and perspectives.

- Don't rush discussions.
- Highlight what you can learn from one another.
- Provide positive and helpful feedback.
- Address concerns as they arise.
- Ask for the student's help in understanding how to meet their needs.
- Look for opportunities for shared decision-making and reflection.

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