

Language and Communications

Understanding and Developing Effective Communications with Family Carers

Thursday 21st May 2026

Virtual Masterclass



Facilitated by:

Dr Karen Lascelles

Senior Lecturer for Mental Health Nursing

Dorit Braun

Lived Experience Speaker

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COURSE OUTLINE

Good and clear communication between clinicians, patients/service users and family carers are vital for establishing and maintaining effective working relationships that can keep people who are experiencing mental health crises safe. This interactive half day course uses audio and video case studies and scenarios to explore common barriers to effective communications and what can be done about them.

We use the term family carers to mean anyone who is significant to the patient, including biological and non biological family and friends who may or may not live in the same household or even the same country.

PROGRAMME OUTLINE

There is a great deal of guidance that expects clinicians to involve the families of people during and following an acute mental health crisis. And yet, Coroner's Prevention of Future Deaths reports, and investigations following homicides when the perpetrator had a diagnosed mental illness, regularly point to the lack of meaningful engagement of the family, the failure to listen to their views, experiences and needs, or to offer them support and information to keep their family member safe. [Martha's rule](#), which is to be extended to mental health services, also requires good working relationships with family carers. Making Families Count Life Beyond the Cubicle project, was funded by NHS England (HEE South East Region legacy funds). The project's resources were co-created with patients, family carers and clinicians, tested in eleven NHS Trusts, and independently evaluated. The resources have been shown to encourage clinicians to work well with family and friends in order to improve care, avoid harm and reduce deaths.

The project worked with clinicians, service users/patients and family carers to identify areas for improvement, barriers to improvement and ways to address these barriers. Communication breakdowns, different understandings of language and terminology, and different expectations were all identified as factors that can obstruct effective communication. A lack of recognition of the 'hot cognitions' experienced by family carers, who themselves are in crisis, was also seen as a barrier to good communication.

The *Life Beyond the Cubicle* eLearning resources are available free to health and social care professionals via the [NHS England eLearning platform](#). NHS Trusts can download the modules and upload them to their own Learning and Development system.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

This course is suitable for anyone working in Health and Social Care whose work brings them into direct contact with someone experiencing a mental health crisis. This includes but is not limited to psychiatrists, nurses, ED service leads, social workers, occupational therapists and peer support workers.

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will

- Consider how the language used by professionals can affect family carers' feelings and attitudes toward services
- Consider how misunderstandings and different meanings attached to words such as crisis, emergency, or urgent by the public and by clinicians can have devastating consequences
- Learn about the impact of uncertainty, changing family dynamics and fear on family carers
- Reflect on how communications with family carers can go wrong and what this means for patients/service users
- Learn about the differences between working face to face and working on the telephone
- Explore improving practice in telephone based work
- Consider good practice ideas

FACILITATORS

Dr Karen Lascelles

Karen Lascelles has been a mental health nurse for over 30 years, always with an interest in self-harm and suicide and she has specialised in this area for the last 15 years. She currently works as a senior lecturer for mental health nursing at Oxford Brookes University, whilst also maintaining a clinical role in psychiatric liaison. In her previous role as nurse consultant, she was involved in supporting colleagues with complex cases, working clinically with people experiencing suicidal crises and their family members or carers, supporting families and carers bereaved by suicide and supporting staff after the death of a patient by suicide.

Karen has been involved in various research projects related to suicide and suicide prevention, and in education and training about suicide risk assessment and management. Her professional doctorate investigated the experiences and support needs of adults who care for an adult family member or friend at risk of suicide.

Dr Dorit Braun

Following a very traumatic family bereavement, Dorit Braun has been active in trying to improve mental health care and the ways NHS staff and organisations learn from deaths.

Before her retirement in 2019, she worked as a Charity Chief Executive and in a variety of senior management and governance roles in the social care and family support sectors. Her background is in adult and community education, and in family and parenting support.

Dorit joined Making Families Count in 2020. She is the co-ordinator of the Life Beyond the Cubicle project. She has contributed to webinars, training and development events and conferences as an expert by experience.

Dorit and Karen led the development of the *Life Beyond the Cubicle* resources.

PROGRAMME OUTLINE

09.40 REGISTRATION

09.45 Welcome and introductions

10.00 How do we address family and friends and what impact might this have

10.15 What do we mean and what do families understand by different terms?

10.45 COMFORT BREAK AND VIRTUAL NETWORKING

11.00 Working on the telephone: patients and families' experiences and improving practice in telephone based work

12.00 Case studies: when family members and patients may not agree

12.30 Summary of good practice ideas and how to implement them

12.45 Reflections, feedback and evaluation

13.00 CLOSE

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Venue

This is a virtual masterclass, with private login details to further online resources and interactive content. Log in details will be sent one week before the event.

Date

☐ Thursday 21st May 2026

Virtual Fee

☐ £195 + VAT for NHS, Social care, private healthcare organisations and universities.

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