

Tips for Making Family Council Meetings Meaningful

One of the challenges in starting a family council is promoting participation in the council. One important way to do this is to conduct efficient and meaningful meetings for those who participate. Some tips for having successful family council meetings are below:

Use Structure

Agenda: Use an agenda - even if it contains just a few simple items. You may even want to assign suggested time limits to agenda items to keep the meeting moving and give participants an idea of what to expect from the beginning.

Meeting Length: If at all possible, try to limit the length of meetings to between 1 hour and 1.5 hours. Because family members' time is limited, people may hesitate to come to meetings if they are too lengthy.

Regular meeting time: Try setting a regular meeting time (i.e.: the 3rd Thursday of each month) so that family members can plan to attend family council meetings ahead of time even if they do not receive announcements or see fliers.

Meeting Procedures: Try using parliamentary procedure, Roberts Rules of Order, or some other agreed-upon structure to keep meetings moving in an orderly and efficient manner.

Make Time for Shared Input

Input/Setting Group Goals: In order for family members to be committed to and active in the family council, they must feel that they have input into group decisions and priorities and that council activities will have an impact on the care their loved one receives. The council should schedule time for family members to have discussion and brainstorming without facility staff present. This private discussion will allow family members to voice any concerns freely and allow the council to decide on group issues and goals. When facility staff are present for these discussions, the discussion can become a "complaint session" rather than an honest, proactive discussion of concerns and actions the family council can take to bring about improvements.

Structure for Input: In order to make this input constructive for the activities of the family council, it is important to facilitate this process with some kind of structure.

Some suggestions for ways to keep the discussion moving are:

- Use a flip chart to compile a list of shared concerns/interests during brainstorming sessions

- For large groups, appoint a time keeper who will remind the group to move on if discussion gets stuck on a particular agenda item
- Hand out index cards and ask people to list top three areas of concern or interest and then compile a group list
- Introduce discussion by asking each person to limit their comments to a certain number of minutes
 - You can use an egg timer with a bell to help remind the group when it is the next person's turn to speak
 - Ask each person in the group to verbally list their top three areas of interest or concern

Focus on Action and Efficiency

Next Steps: Before the end of each meeting, always plot out next steps, review action items and delegate tasks to be accomplished before the next meeting.

Business vs. Pleasure: Try rotating responsibility among members for bringing refreshments. This will enable family members to get to know each other, socialize and support each other informally after the meeting.

Formulate Solutions/Recommendations: Brainstorm with the council for ideas for solutions to concerns raised. Formulate a specific request for how a concern should be addressed.