

## A Good Time to Have a Family Meeting

At this time of year, when families begin to gather together, it is not only a time to have fun but may be a good opportunity to talk about the future. Family meetings can be a practical way to solve issues around providing care to a family member. Here are some suggestions to consider.

Include everyone who is affected by caregiving decisions. If the care receiver cannot attend, then it is important to ask for their opinions and keep them informed. You may want to have two meetings – one without the care receiver to share ideas, identify concerns and resources, and discuss responsibilities. During a second meeting, the care receiver can be actively involved in looking at options and making decisions. Family members who live far away also need to be included. Everyone's thoughts are important and valuable in planning for the care of a loved one.

Improvement of the current care situation is the purpose of the meeting, rather than the resolution of long-standing family issues. Therefore, it is important to keep the meeting focused on the current concern.

Preparation is important to a successful family meeting. In preplanning, ask family members to list concerns and needs before they come to the meeting. Make a list of the types of help that are needed now and may be required in the future. They may include services such as physical care, social activities, transportation, shopping, chores, maintenance around the home, financial assistance, legal issues, and other necessities specific to your family.

Focus on the positive actions family members can take from the meeting. Encourage everyone to be honest about their limitations when identifying what each person can do. Having a list points the discussion toward improving the situation rather than allowing the family to become involved in complaining about how bad things have been.

Develop an agenda incorporating items from the above list. Share this with each family member before the meeting date so that they can have input to the agenda as well as come prepared to discuss how they are able to contribute to supporting their family member.

Each person deserves equal time to have their say and each must feel heard, especially the person needing care. This helps all family members feel important and often results in a sense of responsibility and the feeling that you're all in this together.

Begin the family meeting by identifying the concerns and follow by exchanging solutions and ideas. This is where everyone can share what they are able to do. Some of the identified needs may require accessing service providers in the community and paying for help. Since this may be needed for a period of time, discuss how often you will review the arrangements such as within one or two months.

It may be helpful to put your decisions in writing, ensuring that everyone gets a copy. You might consider using a facilitator to provide guidance, objectivity and suggestions for resources and solutions. This may be a trusted and experienced counselor, member of the clergy, gerontologist or social worker. Working together you can help your family member live as happily and safely as possible.

Monthly support groups are held for family caregivers, people with Parkinson's, MS and recovering from stroke and their family members. All are welcome to attend these informal free sessions. Assistance may be available if you need respite or transportation to attend. For times and locations, contact 1-888-746-5102.

Presentations can be made to any size group on such topics as community resources, caregiving, hospice/palliative care, and prevention of abuse to older adults. Books and educational videos are also available from our lending library.