

HOLDING A FAMILY MEETING

(Adapted from the Fact Sheet "Holding a Family Meeting" with permission of the Family Caregiver Alliance/National Center on Caregiving. For more information, visit the FCA website at www.caregiver.org or call 1-800-445-8106.)

Caregiving can be overwhelming, and asking for help can be difficult. Family caregivers who want to enlist the support of other family members may want to talk about ways to share the caregiving responsibilities. Consider holding a family meeting. A family meeting provides an opportunity for family members to discuss ways to work cooperatively to provide care for elderly loved ones.

Helpful Elements When Planning a Family Meeting

- **Consider who should be included as part of the caregiving team.** This could include family, friends, neighbors and paid caregivers. Look at whether the care recipient can and should be present at the family meeting; he or she may not want to be left out. Also consider whether his or her presence might make it uncomfortable for family members to share thoughts and feelings that would be difficult for the care recipient to hear.
- **Consider enlisting the aid of an outside facilitator** (e.g. a clergy person, social worker, family psychotherapist, private case manager, or mediator) to run the meeting. A facilitator can remain impartial and can help the family discuss difficult subjects while keeping the meeting focused.
- **Prepare an agenda** to keep the meeting on track and focused on the important issues. Ask participants ahead of time to suggest items to be included for discussion. Mail the agenda to all participants ahead of time so they can prepare for the meeting. Even long-distance family members can participate by use of a speakerphone.
- **Take notes and summarize the meeting in writing** for all participants. It may be necessary to schedule follow-up meetings to continue the agenda. When agenda items

have been covered, follow up regularly with email or a telephone tree.

- **Give everyone an opportunity to be heard** and express feelings and opinions. Some of the more difficult issues will take careful consideration and will take some time to resolve; don't feel pressured to solve all of the issues immediately. At the conclusion of the meeting, restate clearly the issues and solutions that have been decided upon, making sure each person understands to what he or she has agreed.
- **Consider regular meetings** (quarterly, semi-annually) or at least schedule meetings when the caregiving situation or other situations in family members' lives change.
- **Be prepared to encounter challenges** in a family meeting. Each family has its own history of how the members relate to the care recipient and to each other. There will be differences in values, interests, and relationships within the family. The function of the meeting is not to "fix" the family, but rather to have everyone included in the care team.
- **Provide a written agreement after the meeting** that states the decisions that have come out of the meeting and agreements made. A calendar for each participant marked with the days designated for tasks will be a helpful reminder to all individuals on the team.
- **Most important, keep in mind that changes happen slowly.** What will be most helpful in running a family meeting is maintaining an atmosphere of acceptance of individual differences and being open to considering a variety of possible solutions. Thanking everyone for their help will motivate them to help again.

Family meeting agenda topics could include:

- The doctor's latest report
- The needs and wants of the care recipient

- Daily caregiving needs and support the primary caregiver needs (such as respite, shopping, cleaning, chores, transportation)
- Feelings about the illness and caregiving
- How much time each member has to assist in caregiving
- Various ways each member can help
- Costs of caregiving
- How much work family members can afford to miss when assisting in caregiving
- What financial help is available within the family and how that can be shared
- Who will make decisions and how they will be made
- What support role each person will play
- List of tasks that need doing