

General communication tips for your family meeting

Effective family meetings involve the opportunity for each family member to share their thoughts about the care and support arrangement and then work together to incorporate those perspectives into the best possible plan for your family.

However, many families worry that they won't be able to communicate well with each other when they start talking about care and support issues.

Here are some general tips to help your family communicate more effectively with each other:

1 Think about the best time to talk

You may have family members who are “not morning people” or don't do very well in the evening. It can be difficult to have good communication when you're not fully awake or are very tired. Try to plan your family meeting at a time when family members, and especially the person with care needs, will be at their best.

2 Set some communication ground rules

At the very beginning of your meeting, agree to some ground rules about how you want to treat each other during your meeting, such as...

“Everything is on the table”

“No raising our voices”

“Everyone gets a chance to talk”

“Everyone put away your phones and devices”

You may find it helpful to write down your ground rules and post them where everyone can see them.

3 Use “I” messages

Do your best to begin your messages to each other with “I.” For example,

“I need...”

“I hope that...”

“I’m afraid that...”

These messages tend to be more successful than saying, “You should...,” “You always...,” or “You never....”

4 Talk with the person who needs care, not about him or her

Some families have a tendency to talk about the person with care needs as if they are not in the room. This can make the person with care needs feel as if they don’t have a say in their own life and may cause him or her to become upset. If you hear yourselves saying, “he” or “she” when referring to a person who is in the meeting, there’s a good chance you’re talking about and not with.

5 Share the air (give everyone a chance to talk)

In most families, there are “talkers” and there are “quiet ones.” Talkers often find it easy to share their thoughts out loud and quiet ones often need a little time to process their thoughts before they speak. Moments of silence can be uncomfortable for talkers and they might feel that they need to fill the silence, which can make it difficult for the quiet ones to get a word in. Don’t feel like you have to fill all the silence. Take a moment to check in with the quiet ones and see if they have anything they would like to say. Give everyone time to process and discuss before moving on to the next item.

6 Take a break

If you feel that you are just not communicating well with each other, despite your best efforts, take a break from your meeting for a few minutes, a few hours, or even a few days. It might just not be the right time for your discussion. But, before you take a break, pick a time to try and meet again.

To learn more and to access our tools and resources for caregiving families, visit the Our Family, Our Way website at www.MiamiOH.edu/ScrippsAging/OFOW