



Our Family Our Way

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 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 voices.

Everyone gets a chance to talk.

Everyone put away 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

When we begin certain statements with “you,” we tend to make others feel defensive. However, “I” messages can be used to share feelings, concerns, needs, and expectations without making the other person feel attacked. For example,

*I feel overworked and would really appreciate some help. **vs.** You never help.*

*I feel misunderstood and it makes me feel upset. **vs.** You don't understand how I feel.*

4 Talk with the person who needs care, not about them

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 them to become upset. If you hear yourselves saying, *he*, *she*, or *they* when referring to a person who is in the meeting, there's a good chance you're talking about and not with them.

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 they need to fill the silence, which can make it difficult for the quiet ones to share. 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 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 meet again.

If your family is having a great deal of difficulty communicating with each other due to differences in opinion and points of view about what's happening, needed, wanted, and possible in your care and support arrangement, refer to our tip sheet ***How do we deal with major differences in our family meeting?***

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**