



How do we deal with major differences in our family meeting?

When your family gets together to discuss what's needed, happening now, wanted, and possible in your care and support arrangement, there are sure to be times when you don't see eye-to-eye. Whenever disagreements or conflict arise, emotions can run high.

Consider setting up some ground rules at the very beginning of your meeting such as "No raising our voices" or "Everyone gets a chance to talk." This gives you an opportunity to agree, in advance, about how you want to treat each other if a disagreement occurs.

If you find yourself in a situation where family members disagree, consider these suggestions:

1 Reflect

Ask yourselves how you came to your different ways of thinking about the issue. Was it...your own observation?...your own worries about risks involved?...another person's observation or opinion?...a professional's opinion?...or, was it something else?

Also, reflect on how you are communicating your viewpoints. For example, consider your body language, tone of voice, and the words you are using.

In times of disagreement, the use of "I" statements can be particularly helpful. Begin sentences with "I need...," "I hope that...," "I'm afraid that...," rather than "You should...," "You always...," "You never..."

2 Demonstrate

Do a "show and tell" exercise. If the family meeting is being held in the home of the person with care needs, he or she might demonstrate how certain tasks are accomplished or how they are a problem. This is also a good way to see what kinds of equipment or home modifications might be needed.

3 Revisit

Go back and revisit the goals of each family member and your family's ultimate goal. Consider how the disagreement can be settled in a way that gets you closer to what your family really wants for your care and support arrangement.

4 Reconnect

Take a moment to reconnect with each other and to reaffirm why you are having the meeting in the first place—you want to create the best possible care and support arrangement for your family. Acknowledge to each other that this is not an easy thing to do, that it will take time, and that you will all make mistakes along the way.

If you know that you have made a mistake or hurt someone, you may need to apologize or talk it through before you can move on to discussing issues of care and support.

5 Regroup

Agree to seek an outside or professional opinion about disputed issues. Have a physician, physical therapist, occupational therapist, nurse, geriatric social worker, or other professional conduct an assessment for you. An in-home assessment is usually best so it can reflect how the person with care needs interacts with their usual environment.

Your local Area Agency on Aging will be able to provide some assessment resources and information on how to get the process started.

If you've tried these tips and are still having major disagreement, agree to disagree for now. Move forward on those items where you have agreement, and make a plan to come back to disputed issues in the future.

If a disagreement becomes verbally abusive or physical, stop your family meeting immediately and consider whether a self-guided process is right for your family. Your family may need to enlist the professional help of a family counselor or a mediator.

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