

Why family meetings can be useful

Family meetings are being used more and more by carers and families to discuss difficult issues and make decisions. This is a great way of drawing family and friends together, making them aware of concerns, asking for their assistance and gaining their support.

Family meetings might be used to:

- ▣ share information
- ▣ gather information
- ▣ impart difficult news
- ▣ make decisions
- ▣ resolve conflict
- ▣ plan for the future.

Tips on organising your own family meeting

- ▣ Choose who you'd like to attend (e.g. your family member, family, friends, health professionals, service providers).
- ▣ Choose a time that will suit most people.
- ▣ Choose a place to meet. Perhaps a quiet café or your local RSL. Sometimes things get more heated at home.
- ▣ Give a reason for the meeting, so people can prepare for the discussion and any decisions that may need to be made.
- ▣ Decide what you would like to achieve by the end of the meeting. Be realistic - don't aim too high.

*"I think I surprised my family when I called the meeting.
They really listened and I felt supported for the first time."*

How to make the most of your family meeting

When you have everyone together, it's important that you make the most of it. Here are some handy hints:

- ▣ See this as a way of involving family.
- ▣ Make some notes in advance - list the things you'd like to discuss and any questions you have.
- ▣ Nominate someone to take notes, if this would help.
- ▣ Allow everyone to have their say.
- ▣ If anything is unclear ask for further explanation.
- ▣ Make it clear if there are decisions to be made.
- ▣ Don't expect to make decisions on-the-spot - some people may need time to consider the options.
- ▣ Suggest a follow up meeting if needed.
- ▣ Clarify what will happen next - and when. Without this, decision making may be delayed indefinitely.
- ▣ Have someone to talk to afterwards.



How to deal with conflict when it arises

Different views, experiences and values can quickly turn a difficult discussion into conflict - and unresolved family issues can add fuel to the fire.

Unresolved issues exist in every family and are often played out at difficult times. This might include past hurts, jealousies or touchy issues. For example:

- ▣ The youngest daughter is not contributing to the decision making because she never feels listened to. Her sisters don't encourage this because they expect her to be silent.
- ▣ The eldest son is preoccupied with the cost of residential care. He is angry that his father continued to support his younger brother and now doesn't have enough money for the bond at the place they prefer.

Tips for dealing with conflict:

- ▣ Identify any unresolved family issues - be aware of the impact this might be having on your discussions.
- ▣ Set some rules (e.g. no personal attacks, no walking away).
- ▣ Don't use blaming words like "You make me feel...".
- ▣ Listen actively to others - this is more than just hearing.
- ▣ Talk about the issues - don't dredge up the past.
- ▣ Take a deep breath before you respond to verbal outbursts - this will give you time to avoid an angry response.
- ▣ Remember that not everyone will see things as you do.
- ▣ If the conflict is severe consider having someone mediate - pick this person carefully.

Further information:

- ▣ The [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) - ph: 1800 242 636*. Information, support and advice for people caring for a family member or friend. You can also request the above information sheets be sent to you - or find out about other information sheets in this series.

*Free call except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates.

We do our best to keep these links up to date, but the internet changes all the time. If you can no longer access any of the above resources, please go to our [Internet Troubleshooting Guide](#), or email us at website@carersvic.org.au