

FAMILY COUNCIL:

A self led group of committed family members who meet regularly in order to work together to improve the quality of life and quality of care for all residents in long term care facilities. In all aspects of long term care life, a family council can influence facility decisions to ensure that residents are properly cared for and supported.

Families are given a voice in decisions that affect them and their loved ones. Family councils challenge facilities to perform better and help them recognize and address problems before they become too large.

Key Concepts Important For Family Councils

Advocacy-The family council should serve as advocates of resident rights, needs and concerns.

Education-The family council should work to educate its members and other long term care consumers about the rights and privileges of residents.

Empowerment-The family council should empower individuals within the facility to make the best possible choices in order to create the most positive long term care environment possible.

Improvement-The family council should be committed to the improvement of all aspects of the long term care experience.

Involvement-The family council should engage in a process of active involvement with families, residents, staff and administration to ensure that effective communication is taking places at all times.

Involve your Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is an advocate fore residents in long term care facilities and their families. The Ombudsman can provide technical assistance, training, guidance, and support in developing a council.





Organize a family council

- ❖ Work with the facility staff to identify a few interested families to help pull together an introductory meeting
 - Identify at least 3-4 family members who are active in the home, positive minded; open to new ideas and who have already been involved in constructive endeavors in the home. Try to find individuals whom have leadership potential
 - Find out when these families may be in the facility. Take this opportunity to explain what a family council is, point out the benefits, let them know that they were approached due to their active involvement and leadership skills, and ask if they would be willing to serve on a committee to organize an introductory family council meeting to the families
 - If they do agree, please provide them with a copy of the Family Councils That Work
- ❖ If it is unknown who may be interested in creating a family council, work with facility staff to plan a family council presentation to which all families would be invited
 - Publicize the presentation
 - Ask the group if there is a true interest in forming a family council. If interest is expressed, suggest the development of a leadership committee made up of 3-4 people to propose a temporary leadership structure. The date, time and location of the first council meeting should be set. Get everyone's phone number and email address
- ❖ If no one steps forward, try:
 - Let it be known that you will be there to assist and guide the leadership committee
 - Ask if 3-4 people would help plan and lead the next meeting. People will often agree to serve if asked
 - If you complete some of the tasks, make sure to involve at least one family member for each task to help families be aware that your role is temporary.

Recruitment

- ❖ Conduct continual recruitment; flyers; mailings
- ❖ Include information about the council in resident admission packets; notice in facility newsletter
- ❖ Greeter in the lobby; after hours and week-ends
- ❖ Establish a “buddy system” where families from the family council are “assigned” to new family members to welcome them, answer any questions they may have from a family’s perspective in the family council

Leadership

- ❖ Plan for long term stability of the group by putting structure in place, such as by-laws
- ❖ Work on leadership development so that if key members of the council stop participating in the council or leave the facility, the group will continue

Relationship

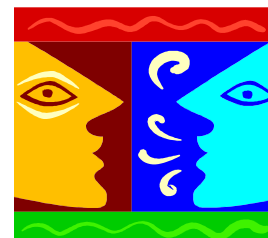
- ❖ Communicate continually with facility staff and management to advise of any common concerns and suggestions, follow up on action to be taken, discuss family council activities, etc...
- ❖ Be a part of the solution to problems or improvements to be made at the facility to the extent possible. When concerns are raised, brainstorm for ideas about how the concern can be addressed
- ❖ Establish contact with the long term care ombudsman. The ombudsman is a valuable resource

Open Communication

- ❖ Family members feel free to voice concerns without fear in meetings where staff are not present
- ❖ Gives facilities honest feedback to use for continuous quality improvement efforts

Purpose


- ❖ Gives family members a place to constructively channel their anger and concern within the facility as an alternative to filing complaints with outside agencies
- ❖ The opportunity to meet privately with other families enables family members to discuss and consolidate common concerns, come up with ideas for how to address issues, and then focus on purposeful goals
- ❖ Keeps facility staff from being overwhelmed by a flood of individual complaints all at once
- ❖ Allows families and the facility to focus on common facility-wide concerns and make improvements for all residents
- ❖ Reduces sense of isolation, helplessness, and frustration





GROUND RULES

Meetings can become unproductive due to high emotion and a focus on more individual issues. Ground rules help to promote good communication without hurt feelings.

- Discussions are **CONFIDENTIAL** and should not be discussed outside the meeting.
- Meetings will be kept to _____ (then set a time limit and appoint a time-keeper).
- Discuss **IDEAS** at meetings not individuals.
- Protect the resident's privacy by not discussing specific medical problems. If you hear sensitive information during a meeting, do not share these things with others once the meeting is over.
- If disagreeing, do so with respect. If disagreed with, do not take it personally.
- Help to negotiate within the group to reach solutions. Ask, "Tell us more about that" or "Anyone else have something to add?"
- One person speaks at a time. Everyone else is listening. Listen Actively. 
- Everyone's input has value and should be acknowledged. Clarify thoughts and provide feedback. Be non-judgmental.
- Discuss one topic at a time.
- Use **FACTS** rather than assumptions for group discussions.



Helpful hints for successful meetings

Family Council meetings should be a time to discuss issues that are common to every resident and family. Conduct efficient and meaningful meetings; time should be spent on discussing possible SOLUTIONS and not just a review of the problem.

- Use a pre-set agenda--even if it contains a few simple items. This will give members an idea of what to expect from the beginning.
- Keep the meeting to a pre-set time limit--between 1 and 1.5 hours. Assign suggested time limits to agenda items to keep the meeting moving. For a group that may be larger, use a flip chart, set a timer or appoint a time keeper who will remind the group to move on if the discussion gets stuck on a particular item.
- Regular meeting time--try to set a regular meeting time so that family members can plan to attend ahead of time. Also, begin and end the meeting on time.
- Keep minutes
 - Give a copy to the facility administrator
 - Review minutes at the beginning of the next meeting to review items that still need work
 - Keep a copy of the minutes in a central location (like the family council bulletin board or notebook)
- Have a sign-in sheet to collect names, addresses and phone numbers.
- Create a phone tree to contact members about meetings, changes, or important events.
- Use time-out signal if needed to let people cool down.
- Post the ground rules during the meeting.
- Set aside a part of each meeting where staff are NOT attending (the fear of retaliation is often enough for families not to feel free to discuss concerns).
- Invite speakers to offer information, support, resources and/or responses to council recommendations. This is essential for interesting and productive council meetings.
- Ask each person to list their top three areas of interest and compile a list.

- Pick both short and long term achievable goals so council members can see real progress.
- Before the end of each meeting, always plot out the next steps, review items of action, and delegate tasks to be accomplished before the next scheduled meeting.
- Rotate the responsibility among members for providing refreshments. This will allow family members to socialize, thus fostering a support network.
- Brainstorm with the council for ideas for solutions to raised concerns. Create a specific request for how a concern should be addressed.
- Establish contact with the long-term care ombudsman. The ombudsman can act as a valuable resource.
- Invite family members of residents who die to continue to participate in the council.
- If family members are reluctant to be seen at family council meetings, consider meeting someplace else so that they will feel more comfortable coming to the meetings.
- Produce brochures, flyers, and newsletters so that families have visual reminders
- Ask the nursing home to put information about the family council in their newsletter to families
- Place a bulletin board in the lobby to share the mission statement and successes of the family council, information about meetings and other items of interest to family members.

- **Keys to Success**

- Meet with the administrator
- Involve facility staff
- Put it in writing!
- Pick your battles
- Do your homework
- Stick to the agenda
- Involve the residents
- Raise concerns when they occur
- Post by-laws and mission statement
- Recruit, recruit, recruit
- Communicate with all families
- Every member has a job
- The council has leadership
- Celebrate cultures of residents and staff



Remember

Never Doubt That A Small Group Of Thoughtful Committed Citizens Can Change The World; Indeed It's The Only Thing That Ever Does. Margaret Mead

Centralina Area Agency on Aging
Ombudsman Program
1-800-508-5777
www.centralina.org

Debi L. Lee, Lead Ombudsman
Mecklenburg Adult Care Homes

Laurie Abounader, Regional Ombudsman
Anson, Cabarrus and Union

Cindy Kincaid, Regional Ombudsman
Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln

Hillary Kaylor, Regional Ombudsman
Mecklenburg Nursing Homes

Patricia Cowan, Regional Ombudsman
Rowan and Stanly

Heather Armstrong, Regional Ombudsman
Mecklenburg Adult Care Homes