Strategies for Successful, Supportive Family Meetings

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Topics of Discussion

- Benefits of Family Meetings
- Family Dynamics and how they impact family conflict
- How to organize a successful family meeting
- Effective communication strategies
- Solution focused approach
- Conflict resolution strategies
- Utilize resources
- Key to success
Benefits of Family Meetings

- **Solves problems.** Families often walk on eggshells around an obvious caregiving problem that never gets resolved because no one wants to address the issue. A successful family meeting can be used to eliminate the tension and hash out the issue, therefore leading to a joint resolution.

- **Reduces stress.** Providing family members with an opportunity to get everyone on the same page about what’s going on with the care recipient can reduce caregiver stress significantly.

- **Builds family unity.** A family that meets together tends to stick together in their decisions and support each individual family member, as well as the care recipient.

- **Strengthen family culture and values.** Family meetings are an effective way to support your family’s culture and values for the care recipient.

- **Learn life skills.** Participating in family meetings, will provide you with an opportunity to learn important life skills such as problem solving, planning, conflict resolution, and effective communication.
Family Dynamics

- Individual Roles Impact Family Conflict
  - Family systems include:
    - Leadership
    - Decision making
    - Managing family finances, provision of resources
    - Maintaining discipline
    - Providing nurture and support
Dysfunctional Family Roles

The Hero is typically the oldest child and is often described as trustworthy, dutiful, mature, helpful and organized.

The Placater is typically a girl and may also be the oldest child. She is often described as caring, compassionate, giving and a good listener.

The Scapegoat is typically the second child and is often described as irritating, defiant, deceitful, hostile and disobedient.

The Lost Child seems to fall through the cracks almost disappearing at times. They are often described as quiet, shy, lonely, solemn and passive.

The Mascot is typically the youngest child and is often described as outgoing, entertaining, excitable, cheerful and playful.

Do you recognize these roles in your family?
Develop Healthy Family Roles

- **Establish Clear Roles and Allocate Fairly**
  - Roles should be clear and identifiable
  - Acknowledge roles and responsibilities
  - Assign roles/responsibilities among various family members

- **Allow for Flexibility**
  - Family roles change over time (crisis specific)
Organization of Meeting

- **Who should attend?**
  - Define caretaking team
    - Which family members?
    - Neighbor?
    - Family friend?
    - Physician?
    - Social Worker?
    - Care recipient?
How to Begin Meeting

- Effective communication is necessary
  - Extend personal invitation to caretaking team
  - Designate a person as the point of contact
  - Assign a scribe for the meeting
  - Utilize technology
    - Videotape or Skype meeting
Preparation for Meeting

- Develop an Agenda
  - Latest report from physicians
  - Share feelings about illness/caregiving
  - Be prepared to discuss fears about death, dying, being overwhelmed, sadness, anger, guilt, shame, and care recipients wishes by utilizing your communication style (Analytical, Amiable, Expressive, or Driver).
  - Establish ground rules
  - Select an appropriate meeting location
Ground Rules

- Be respectful
- No judgement
- Open minded
- Be helpful
- Be willing
- Be supportive
- Be yourself
- Believe in yourself
- Be on time
- Be a good listener
- Cell phones off
- WHHSHH
- Be attentive
- No yelling
Agenda - Topics of Discussion

- Daily caregiving needs
  - Should the sick person move in with us?
  - Assisted living, nursing facility, home care?
  - How much time can family realistically commit?
  - What other support is available (formal and informal)?
  - What community resources can we access?
  - Safety concerns?
Agenda - Topics of Discussion

- Financial concerns
  - How much will care cost?
  - How much work can family members afford to miss?
  - What financial help is available from outside resources?

- End of life decisions
Assign Responsibilities

- Who will make decisions?
  - Medical, financial, hiring a caregiver, how will they be made?

- What support role does each person want to play?

- What sort of support does the primary caregiver need?
  - Need for respite (a break from caregiving)?
  - Help with meals, shopping, cleaning, laundry, etc.
  - Emotional support
  - Help with transportation to appointments

- How will the caregiving and support needs change as the illness progresses?
Potential Challenges

- Families come with history.

- A narrow focus for each meeting can help alleviate some of the pitfalls. Still, you will have to deal with some of the difficult issues when they get in the way of cooperation.

- If alcohol will detract from the main focus of the meeting or will lead to conflict, it is better not to offer it.
Problem Solving Strategies

- **Solution Focused Approach**
  - Focus on identifying goals.
  - Create a list of tasks.
  - Generate a description of what life will be like when goal is accomplished.
  - Small accomplishments; focus on when the goal may have already happened to some degree in order to co-construct an effective solution.
Conflict Styles and their Consequences

- **Competing**: relies on aggressive communication; low regard for relationships; low level of trust

- **Accommodating**: one’s needs is yielded to others’ needs; preserving the relationship is most important

- **Avoiding**: if we ignore it, it will go away; instead, conflict festers

- **Compromising**: series of tradeoffs; satisfactory but not satisfying

- **Collaborating**: pooling of individual needs and goals toward a common goal; “win-win”
Barriers to Effective Communication

- **Filtering**
  - Refers to a sender manipulating information so that it will be seen more favorably by the receiver.

- **Selective Perception**
  - Receivers in the communication process selectively see and hear based on their own needs, motivations, experience, background, and other personal characteristics.

- **Defensiveness**
  - When individuals interpret another’s message as threatening, they often respond in ways that reduce effective communication.

- **Language**
  - Words mean different things to different people.
Interest-Based Approach

• Ensure relationships are the first priority

• Keep people and problems separate

• Pay attention to others
  ◦ Body language
  ◦ Expressive language

• Listen first; talk second

• Explore options together
Eight Steps to Conflict Resolution

• **Step 1**
  - **Know yourself!**
  - **Take care of yourself!**
  - **Understand your biases and triggers.**
  - **Create a positive personal environment**
    - *Eating, sleep, and exercise.*
Eight Steps to Conflict Resolution

- **Step 2**
  - *Identify desired outcomes/goals from a negotiated process.*
Eight Steps to Conflict Resolution

Step 3

- **Identify a safe place for negotiation:**
  - Appropriate place for discussion where it is private
  - Mutual consent to meeting time/place/date
  - Role of support people as needed
    - Facilitators, mediators, advocates as needed
  - Revisit agreed upon ground rules
Eight Steps to Conflict Resolution

- **Step 4**
  - Take a listening stance into the interaction.
  - Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
  - Use active listening skills.
  - Take a breath.
  - Remove distractions as much as possible.
  - Sit or face the other person directly with an open posture.
  - Focus on listening as your first priority.
Eight Steps to Conflict Resolution

• **Step 5**
  - Assert your needs clearly and specifically.
  - Use “I” messages as tools for clarification.
  - Build from what you have heard – continue to listen well.
  - Remain open and flexible.
Eight Steps to Conflict Resolution

- **Step 6**
  - Approach problem-solving with flexibility.
  - Identify issues clearly and concisely.
  - Brainstorm – or generate options – while deferring judgment.
  - Be open to problem definitions.
  - Clarify criteria for decision-making.
Eight Steps to Conflict Resolution

- **Step 7**
  - Manage an impasse calmly, patiently and respectfully.
  - Clarify feelings.
  - Focus on underlying needs, interests and concerns.
Eight Steps to Conflict Resolution

• **Step 8**
  
  ◦ Build an agreement that works.
  ◦ Is the agreement fair? Balanced? Realistic?
  ◦ Follow-up; Develop an Action Plan:
    • Measure goals/outcomes.
    • Revisit the process; what is working, what is not working.
# Caregiver Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>DETAILS</th>
<th>RESPONSIBLE PARTY</th>
<th>DATE COMPLETED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A one hour caregiver meeting to discuss the care recipients needs and support to the caretaking team</td>
<td>The meeting arranged by the end of March.</td>
<td>Sister (Joan) will facilitate a one hour meeting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support group participation</td>
<td>List of Alzheimer Support groups/information</td>
<td>Not assigned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community resources</td>
<td>Explore resources available for durable medical equipment</td>
<td>Aunt Mary will call at least 3 agencies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Insurance</td>
<td>Inquire as to what Mass Health will cover for services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit several adult day health centers</td>
<td>Materials and contact information left with caregiver</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respite schedule</td>
<td>Manage respite care schedule</td>
<td>Utilize technology; google shared calendar. Uncle John to manage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce stress</td>
<td>Information on yoga classes for Joan and Aunt Mary; caregiver support</td>
<td>Joan/Mary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Keys to Success

- Healthy Family Relationships
- Organization of meeting
- Develop an Agenda
- Be Responsible in Fulfilling Family Roles
- Focus on Family Strengths
- Family Assessment; expectations, needs, realistic achievements, individual roles
- Measure Goals
- Develop an Action Plan
- Apply Solution Focused Approach
- Apply Conflict Resolution Strategies
- Utilize Resources
References


