

Key Components of Family Councils

Recruitment

- Conduct continual recruitment.
- Include information about the council in resident admission packets.
- 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, and invite them to participate in the family council.
- Produce brochures or fliers that council members can give to other family members they see when they visit.
- Provide a sign in sheet at meetings for names, telephone numbers and addresses of family members who attend in order to make future contacts and share reminders of meetings.

Leadership

- Plan for the long-term stability of the group by putting structure in place, such as simple 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.
- Invite family members of residents who die to continue to participate in the council.

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.
- To the extent possible, be part of the solution to problems or improvements to be made at the facility. When raising concerns, brainstorm for ideas about how the concern can be addressed.
- Establish contact with the long-term care ombudsman. The ombudsman can act as valuable resource.

Improvement

- Briefly evaluate meetings afterwards to see if that meeting accomplished its purpose (communicating a certain point, coming up with ideas for addressing an issue, getting a commitment from facility staff about action to be taken), and make notes of things to improve upon.
- Focus on common goals (identify and continuously assess progress).
- Follow procedures for conducting effective meetings, such as using agendas, starting and ending meetings on time, sticking to the topic scheduled for discussion, “assign” tasks for future activities to be accomplished before the next meeting.
- Become educated about the laws and regulations that apply to nursing homes and particular issues affecting nursing home residents such as the provision of sufficient numbers of staff and staff training.

Thoughtfulness

- Make sure that all activities and communications have a purpose and will progress the family council towards its goals.
- Remember that family councils may not produce immediate results, but they can be very effective if the council perseveres.
- Active councils may consider acting as a resource for new family councils at other facilities.
- Focus initially on “achievable” goals and projects.