

Leadership in Family Councils

Importance of Family Leadership

The leadership of family members is important to the effective operation of family councils. Family leadership provides the opportunity for the family council to be a self-led, self-determining, consumer group of relatives and friends of residents. By encouraging a united voice for mutual goals and concerns, council members need not fear retaliation, and are able to address problems that affect all residents.

Models of Leadership

Traditional Model: This model of leadership includes a Chairperson/President, Vice-Chairperson/Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. The chairperson presides over family council meetings, the vice-chairperson fills in for the chairperson along with other delegated duties, the secretary records the minutes of council meetings, and the treasurer handles the council's funds and financial records.

Co-Chair Model: This model is structured so two family members share the responsibility of facilitating meetings, communicating with the administration, etc. Sometimes council members are hesitant to volunteer to lead an office, but may be willing to share the office with another member. Having co-chairs or alternating leadership can help family members build leadership skills.

Committee Model: This model is structured so that several family members share responsibilities in creative ways and distribute work more widely. Many family councils choose this model. This model helps councils to overcome the obstacle of recruiting officers because members fear that too much work will be involved.

Electing new officers at regular intervals is a way to rotate leadership positions among members and to prevent leaders from becoming burned out.

Benefits of the Leadership Committee Model

Sharing the Burden

A committee structure allows several people to share the responsibility and time commitment of leadership.

Stability/Continuity

Some councils begin with a leadership committee that agrees to guide the council through its first few months. As family members get to know each other and additional participants are recruited, then formal elections can be held. This model provides for continuity if a leader has to leave the family council.

Combination of Talents

Sharing leadership as widely as possible will allow several family members build skills and confidence in leading the council. Some family members may be more comfortable working in a "behind the scenes" leadership role. The committee concept can be adapted to the needs of each individual family council.

Important Roles of a Family Leader

- A leader must be a good facilitator. It is a leader's task to see that all members get a fair hearing on issues, to move meeting business along in an efficient way, and to see that the wishes of the majority of council members are respected.
- A leader of a family council needs to be able to move family discussions towards a plan for action. This takes sensitivity and skill on the part of the leader because if the discussion is cut short, an important point may be missed. On the other hand, if council members discuss the same topic repeatedly, it is time to move from discussion to action.
- A leader needs to present the concerns and ideas of the family council formally to the facility staff and administration in a reasonable, non-threatening way. Cooperation between the family council and the administration increases the chances for effective action and meaningful change that positively affects the quality of residents' lives.
- A leader must focus on the common concerns of the members of the family council.

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (formerly NCCNHR) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization founded in 1975 by Elma L. Holder that advocates for quality care and quality of life for consumers in all long-term-care settings