

When Families Disagree

Written by Molly Hofer and Cammy Seguin, University of Illinois Extension Educator, Family Life

When a caregiving crisis occurs within a family, it can bring family members closer together or it can drive them apart. As the demands of caregiving increase, family caregivers may find it difficult to balance the tasks at hand with the needs of other family members. Past family conflicts may resurface during this time.

Reasons for Family Conflict

- Disagreements regarding the primary caregiver's actions
- The financial strains of caregiving
- Lack of support for the primary caregiver or her unwillingness to accept support
- Denial of the severity of the illness

When conflict occurs, as it may, a family meeting can be a big step in working out disagreements. By gathering together, family members can take a good look at the situation, plan for the future, and divide the responsibilities. It is important that the care-receiver be included in the decision-making whenever possible.

Ground Rules for the Family Meeting

- No one is allowed to dominate the discussion.
- No one may interrupt when someone else is speaking.
- Everyone must be respectful of the opinions of others, even if they disagree.
- Everyone should be given a chance to talk about her concerns before a decision is made.
- All discussions should relate to the point at hand and not to past family arguments.

The meeting should focus on what needs to be done and who will be responsible for each task. Begin by asking for volunteers for the various tasks. Everyone can do something, even if she is busy or lives far away. Distant family members can handle paperwork, research local agencies, and make regular phone calls to the care-receiver and the primary caregiver.

Inevitably, the primary caregiver will still have a greater number of responsibilities, but the outcome of the meeting should be to assign as many duties as possible to others. If a family member is unwilling to assist in providing care, don't continue to push the issue. Save your energy for more important tasks. Remember to set a future meeting date to evaluate the plan and make necessary adjustments.

Ongoing Family Concerns

Family disagreements, especially around caregiving issues, continue to evolve over time. It is essential that families continue their efforts to:

- Work on having good family relations that strengthen needed support
- Expect family members to share in carrying out the tasks that need to be done
- Keep family communications open

