



Family Council Manual



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About Resident and Family Advisory Council Education (RFACE)

The Office of Ombudsman for Long-Term Care is a program of the Minnesota Board on Aging. The Office advocates for adults needing or receiving long-term care services and promotes person-directed living that respects individual values and preferences, and the preservation of individual rights.

The Office provides educational resources and support to persons who live in nursing homes, boarding care homes, and their families. We provide the following resources:

- Self-advocacy in relation to quality of care and life.
- Rights and responsibilities.
- Care and services.
- Regulations that apply to nursing or boarding care homes and residents.
- Resident and Family Council organization and maintenance.

This service is called RFACE: Resident and Family Advisory Council Education. For more information on Resident and Family Advisory Council Education (RFACE) or to request RFACE educational resources:

Contact Us

The Office of Ombudsman for Long-Term Care

Phone: 651-431-2555 or 1-800-657-3591

Email: MBA.OOLTC@state.mn.us

Website: mn.gov/ooltc

Family Council Overview

In Minnesota, resident and family councils emerged in the 1970s. In 1985, Minnesota created the Resident and Family Advisory Council Education (RFACE) program to offer education resources for nursing and boarding care home Resident and Family Councils.

A family council operates by and for families of persons who live in nursing homes and boarding care homes. Family council participants advocate for the well-being of their relatives by partnering with them in promoting and enhancing quality of daily life.

Residents who consider close friends and associates “family” may also participate in the family council.

Family Council Purpose

- Respect and promote resident centered living and quality of life.
- Advocate for resident rights, quality care, and supports.
- Suggest improvements in supports, practices, and policy.
- Receive important information about the home’s operations.
- Receive education about rights and regulations.
- Partner with residents and resident council on joint events.
- Share experiences and seek support among family members.

Family Council Benefits

Families learn about long-term care services and supports, along with the role of regulatory agencies to promote an understanding of the home’s obligations and operations. Listed below are some of the benefits of establishing a Family Council.

Residents benefit from increased involvement with families:

- Families can discuss what's working well and what needs improvement, share activities, and work together on projects. This promotes partnership and cooperation among the councils.

Family engagement with nursing home employees:

- Councils may invite the administrator, social services, dietary, nursing staff, and other staff to meetings to explain their responsibilities and department operations.

Family input:

- Family councils may offer ideas about topics such as remodeling plans, family events, or systemic problems.

Groups are effective:

- An organized group of family members can positively influence the individual home, or all homes, by contacting their legislators, attending a resident rally, or testifying at a committee. Management of the home cannot interfere with the council.

Organizing a Family Council

Every family council is unique. Some councils use parliamentary procedures or a Learning Circle (refer to the Appendix to learn or review the Learning Circle concepts) to conduct meetings to gather information. Some may elect leaders and create committees.

Here are some steps to start your Family Council:

- Talk with other families who may be interested being part of the council.
- Decide the date, time, and agenda for the first meeting (at later meetings the group can decide day of week, time of day, frequency, and length of on-going meetings).
- Engage with the designated staff person to assist in arranging a private space when organizing a meeting.
- Post meeting information in an accessible location around the nursing home.
- If interested, invite residents, staff, and other guests.

Council Membership Expectations

Council members:

- Promote resident rights and respect confidentiality.
- Define goals and understand the responsibilities of the council.
- Meet with resident council members to share ideas.
- Believe the council can positively impact resident life.
- Display a positive attitude and enthusiasm.
- Inspire participants toward their common goal of quality of life and supports for residents.
- Encourage all members to participate and speak freely.
- Listen and communicate well. They identify facts and clarify what is heard and spoken.
- Maintain objectivity and lead members to agreement.
- Work well with the designated staff person and administration.

Building Trust with Nursing Home Staff

Family Council members and residents may face these challenges:

- Fear of retaliation by nursing home staff.
- Resistance from staff or limited assistance.

Fear of retaliation (real or perceived) happens when we think speaking out may result in a negative outcome. If staff exhibit verbal and nonverbal ways of retaliation to you or your family, you are protected by federal and state law from retaliation. It is required that the nursing or boarding care home's leadership promptly address this problem. Arrange a meeting with the administrator or other key staff to discuss concerns. Invite a Regional Ombudsman to facilitate and advocate on behalf of the residents. Another resource is the Office of Health Facility Complaints at the Minnesota Department of Health.

Nursing Home Staff

Family councils can invite the facility staff to participate as observers or presenters. However, facility staff may only be involved by invitation. Furthermore, staff are not voting members, council facilitators, or group leaders. The management of a home cannot interfere with a council and has a responsibility to promote and support the family council.

Nursing home responsibility:

- The nursing home must provide the family council with a private place to meet.
- Staff must choose a designated staff person to assist the councils if needed.
- The nursing home must consider the views of the family council and act promptly upon concerns and recommendations.
 - The facility must address the concerns and provide reasons for the response.
 - This does not mean that the facility must approve every request of the family council.

Working with Staff

The designated staff person is the nursing home's employee assigned or "designated" to:

- Provide assistance and a private space for resident and family council meetings.
- Respond to requests resulting from council meetings.

The designated staff person empowers both resident and family councils to take ownership of their councils.

The designated staff person is not expected to attend council meetings and, in fact, can only attend by invitation from the resident or family. The designated staff person's role is to be of assistance to the councils to the extent that members want assistance. Council members can invite the designated staff person to meetings as a listener.

Councils are resident or family run and directed. Therefore, the designated staff person role does not include facilitation of council meetings unless invited by the council. When functioning as a facilitator, the staff liaison should encourage or remind members to choose a facilitator.

Appropriate Tasks for Designated Staff

Primary tools for the designated staff person include the resident council manual, family council manual, and resident rights. A designated staff member should:

- Help as requested with administrative council tasks.
- Maintain confidentiality of discussions within council meetings.
- Assist with the recruitment of members and leaders.
- Promote awareness and appreciation of the council.
- Explain the home's policies and procedures.
- Inform members of changes/decisions in the home and ask for input.
- Act as a liaison between members and management of the home.
- Facilitate group process by council invitation only.
- Invite guest speakers of the resident/family choice.

Furthermore, designated staff persons can help address the needs of the family council and resident by:

- Empowering council participants.
- Respecting council autonomy and confidentiality.
- Respecting council role and functions.
- Offering tools to residents and families.
- Maintaining good boundaries.
- Being accurate and consistent in giving information.
- Maintaining integrity by acting only on information requested by the council.
- Working with residents and families toward continuous quality improvement.
- Promoting the councils at various resident, family, and staff events.
- Being a good communicator and active listener.
- Being positive and objective.

Addressing Concerns

By law, the administration must respond to your concerns. Resident and family groups working together can be a strong collective voice to influence positive change. If you need to address an issue, you can take the following steps:

Identify and define the problem or concern from the residents' perspective.

- Council members determine whether a concern is an isolated event, an ongoing problem for one person, or a concern of several residents.

Compile a list of action steps for a solution.

- Discuss all ideas and possible advantage or disadvantage of each. Let the facility know if you are looking for further investigation into something or if your council has specific solutions to recommend.

Choose the best option.

- Informally present the issue by talking with the administrator or key department head. You can also choose to formally submit a recommendation by using the council action form, resident complaint form, or grievance procedure.

Make a copy of the form to retain with the council records.

- Give the form to the designated staff person and be willing to meet with staff to discuss the concern.

Evaluate satisfactory resolution.

- If the issue is not resolved, ask why it isn't.

Request assistance from the Office of Ombudsman for Long-Term Care.

- A Regional Ombudsman is assigned to advocate for residents in every county across Minnesota and in every nursing home.

Addressing concerns can be a difficult task. By partnering with nursing and boarding home staff, families have the power to champion resident rights in day-to-day life to create a home in which residents enjoy living, families enjoy visiting, and employees enjoy working.

Holding a Family Council Meeting

Hosting an educational topic or planning a special event are common council functions. Meetings are also a common feature of Family Councils. A typical council meets regularly and has an agenda.

During the Meeting

As you begin holding your meetings, you can use the following as a guide:

- Introduce each family member and invite a brief remark about their interests or background.
 - Discuss the use of the Learning Circles (See Appendix) for each meeting.
 - A Learning Circle may be used for introductions.
- Explain the role and benefits of a family council.
- Ask a family participant to facilitate the current meeting.
- Discuss and decide on-going council facilitation options:
 - One family member serving for a specific amount of time.
 - Two members as co-facilitators.
 - Council members rotate as a facilitator.
 - Group facilitation.
 - No facilitator.
- Decide on the details of on-going council meetings.
 - For example, you can make decisions on the frequency, on the day, the time of day, and length of a meeting. This decision may be delayed until a second or third meeting when more families may be in attendance.
- Discuss and decide if having offices such as president, vice president, treasurer, or recorder is appropriate for your council.
 - Officers are not necessary but may give structure to the council. Officers may also function in the facilitator role as described above.
- Distribute and review resident rights.
 - Consider a formal presentation on rights at a later meeting by the Regional Ombudsman or Council Specialist.
- Solicit and discuss topics, issues, or concerns to address.

- Gather information from the resident council and from families and residents who don't attend council meetings by using individual interviews, a discussion group, or a survey.
- Discuss creating committees to address topics that are short-term or permanent. These decisions may naturally occur as topics and concerns arise.

It is not required to take minutes for your meeting. However, it is recommended to have minutes taken as it may assist in tracking and recording what occurs during meetings.

After the Meeting

- If you have decided to take meeting notes, type the meeting notes or minutes.
- Review the draft minutes for distribution at the next meeting if possible.
 - You can also distribute, review, and accept changes at the next meeting.
- Retain notes, requests for action, minutes, agendas, and council action forms.

The designated staff person is responsible for responding to written requests from council meetings while being mindful that specific details of the meetings are confidential.

Family Council Ideas

There are many things you can do with a Family Council. Below are some ideas.

Educational Opportunities: Invite speakers from within, or outside the nursing home, to learn about resident rights, nursing home regulations and operations, or any related long-term care topic or issue. You could address some of these topics:

- Care Concerns
 - Pressure sores
 - Restraints
 - Responding to call lights
- Care conference & individualized care plan
- Common diseases
- End of life issues
- Legislative issues
- Long-term care ombudsman program
- Medical assistance
- Medicare
- Medications
- Memory Care and Dementia
- Nursing home survey
- Nutrition and hydration
- Paying bills
- Person Centered Care
- Physician's role
- Problem solving
- Resident rights
- Regulations of the nursing home
- Vulnerable adult act

Create a Welcoming Committee: Welcoming Committee members can contact families of new residents to offer information, support, and council meeting invitations.

Projects: Participate in current projects such as helping plan family nights or assisting the resident council in fundraising projects. You can also create new initiatives of interest for residents. Below are some examples:



Problem-Solving: Address common problems for residents. For example, you can help address call lights not promptly answered, lack of activity, or food quality.

Outreach: Arrange for a kiosk or bulletin board for Family Council information. You can create a council newsletter or write a column for the nursing home newsletter.

Other ideas to consider are:

- Sponsor a social event for families and residents to participate in legislative issues.
- Write a family handbook.
- Fundraise for special projects.
- Give an "employee of the month" award.

- Include the name and phone number of the council contact person in the new resident packet and involve residents in the broader community in resident and family events and projects.

Other Resources

- **Minnesota Department of Health** accepts complaints about alleged violations of resident rights and regulations from individuals and the council itself.

Phone: (651) 201- 4201 or toll-free: (800) 369-7994

Website: health.state.mn.us

- **Minnesota Board of Examiners for Nursing Home Administrators** licenses nursing home administrators.

Phone: (651) 201-2730

Website: mn.gov/boards/beltss/

- **Minnesota Board of Nursing** licenses registered nurses and licensed practical nurses.

Phone: (612) 317-3000 or toll-free: (888) 234-2690

Website: mn.gov/boards/nursing/

- **Minnesota Adult abuse Reporting Center (MAARC)** takes reports of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or other concerns that may be investigated by the Minnesota Department of Health.

Phone: 1-844-880-1574

Appendix

The Learning Circle

The Learning Circle

By Laverne Norton, Action Pact, Inc.
From Culture Change Now Website

An important Communication tool in all stages of culture change, the circle makes everyone equal.

The rules of the circle help those who typically talk and have the most authority be quiet and listen. And, it encourages those who are typically shy or don't have much formal authority to speak up.

It can be used as an activity just to get people talking or as a way to let everyone weigh in when there is a decision to be made.

Here is how it goes...

- One person is chosen to facilitate. One person poses a question or issue and asks for a volunteer.
- The volunteers share his or her answer or view and then the person sitting to the right or left of the person goes next.
- The process continues around the circle until all have shared.
- There is no cross talk during the process.
- A person may choose to pass, but after everyone else has shared, the facilitator should offer that person another opportunity to express his or her view.
- Once everyone has shared, the floor is open for general discussion.

Learning circles should be used often for the best results. Regular use of learning circles creates an open learning environment.

Example Council Action Form

| Council Action Form | |
|--|--|
| To: _____ From: _____ Date: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Resident Council <input type="checkbox"/> Family Council |
| Concern(s) | Recommendations/Solutions |
| | |
| Please return to the resident council by Date of: _____ | |
| Staff name (staff responding): _____ Date: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ | |
| Implementation date: _____ Staff signature: _____ | |
| *Reminder: Make a copy of this form before submitting to staff for reference. | |

This Family Council manual provides information about nursing home and boarding care home family councils. The Office of Ombudsman for Long-Term Care also provides support and advocacy for resident councils and family councils in both nursing and boarding care homes and in assisted living communities. If you need further assistance or would like the Council Specialist to attend a resident or family council, please call 1-800-657-3591 or 651-341-9368.