



## Top Tips for Making Meetings Effective

*These tips have all been collected from carers and staff who regularly attend and perhaps also chair meetings. They are not meant to be a definitive guide on running a meeting but just some handy hints and points to consider.*

### Preparation

- **Always be prepared** for the meeting. Feeling prepared will help you to stay calm.
- **Organise a comfortable room** e.g. chairs with space for everyone and refreshments.
- **Prepare the agenda** - decide how much time is to be allocated to each item then write and highlight it on your own copy. Agree a signal with a colleague if s/he notices you are running over.
- **Contact people** who should have carried out action points for the next meeting
- Be clear about the **purpose of the meeting** and what it hopes to achieve
- Be clear about the **roles of individuals**
- A **well managed and realistic agenda** is the key to a good meeting. It means that the meeting will finish on time which is essential for carers and professionals to plan their time effectively.
- **Do your homework** The chair (and everyone else really) needs to have done their homework and that means getting the papers out before the meeting. I hate wasting meeting time reading what I should have been able to do previously. Colour coded papers works well e.g. different topics or subgroups could have their own colour saves riling to find the right one if you can identify by colour.
- **Manage hot topics** If there is a reluctance to give up AOB then make sure it is notified to the chair in advance this will allow of management of hot topics and also make sure that the end of the meeting does not overrun by being sidelined on items for the next agenda or inappropriate items.

### At the beginning

- **Arrive early** so that you are not rushed.
- **Greet people** as they arrive, make them feel welcome, give them a cup of tea, introduce them to a couple of people, so they don't feel out of place or on their own.
- **Start on time.** Members will appreciate this; otherwise they will arrive late on a regular basis because they think the meetings never start on time. Consequently the time allocated for the meeting will get less and less.



- **Be clear** at the outset of the meeting what you wish to achieve.
- **Do introductions** if everyone does not know each other or if there are new members.
- **Give out stickies** at the beginning and ask everyone to write down one or two words which describe how they are feeling at that moment. Put all stickies on a flip chart so everyone can look at them later. This acts as an ice breaker and helps to move the meeting beyond individual feelings especially when the meeting may be emotive.
- Ensure that there is a **minute taker**

## During the Meeting

- **Good timekeeping** - start and end the meeting on time. Do **not** start again if members arrive late
- **Don't assume everyone is used to attending meetings** - some people may attend meetings very infrequently.
- **Agree a format** at the start of the meeting of how people can ask questions/debate etc i.e. will this be done through the chair so any discussion is heard and there is no over talking of each other.
- **Have a clear agenda and follow it**
- Have agreed **start and finish times**.
- **Keep to the agenda**.
- **Keep discussion to the point** and the agenda - limiting side tracks
- **Don't use jargon!** This excludes people - even if they can ask what something means, many people don't like to do this, it makes them feel stupid.
- **Encourage people to have their say** Think about ways of encouraging people to have their say, so that it's not always the same few confident people who always speak - be creative or amusing about this, e.g., maybe have a 'talking spoon' for part of the meeting, which someone has to hold to speak (and no-one else speaks then!), etc.
- Try to **give everyone a chance to participate** which does mean closing down the most confident attendees.
- If the meeting gets bogged down with **personal issues** suggest this is discussed with a nominated person at the end of the meeting.
- Remember that when a member **deviates from the agenda** it may be because they are upset about a personal issue. Bring the meeting back to the agenda by saying, something like - "this concerns me, but we do not have enough information to deal with today" "we need to look into this further", can you see me about this when we break for lunch"
- **Make sure everyone feels comfortable with the content** and level of debate; you may have to paraphrase or give simpler explanations.
- Ensure that the overview and **decisions are the members** and not your own.



- If you've got something to say - say it, if you've got nothing to say - say nothing.
- **Paperwork** - If there are to be leaflets and written information available at a meeting, only give it out when needed or you will lose valuable contributions because your members are reading and have stopped listening.
- **Be flexible** - Don't make it too formal, although there is a process to follow being flexible and enjoying the meeting is as important in ensuring it is effective

## Refreshments

- If providing refreshments schedule for them to be ready a few minutes before the meeting starts e.g. 10.15 for 10.30 this will get clanking cups and chit chat out of the way before you start - less chance of sub meetings where members of the group are trying to catch up with each other.
- If meetings are more than 2 hours, schedule in a comfort break but it must be time bound. The chair must be strong enough then to call everyone back to order.

## Actions

- **Clarify any actions** needed, it is important to decide then and there who is going to do them and by when and ensure these are minuted.
- Summarise key points in the discussion to help ensure everyone is together and those that may have missed something can remain in the discussion
- Make sure there are outcomes from the meeting and it is not a tick box or talking shop but that everyone has the opportunity to contribute
- **Minutes** - ensure minutes are short, factual and in easy to read format with actions and timescales clearly indicated.

## Afterwards

Always evaluate your meetings afterwards but do not feel things are not ok - just learn from your mistakes and move on.

## Don't forget

- You're only human!
- Bring some humour into proceedings especially if things get a little heated or subject matter is particularly dry.

## & finally

- Stay calm!!