

Effective meetings



Organising committee meetings

Regular meetings of the committee, (although perhaps difficult to organise) play an important part in the running of the national group. The number of meetings you will need will depend on the nature of the group and what you want to achieve. There are several things to consider when organising committee meetings:

- Committee members should be aware of their responsibility to attend meetings before agreeing to take on the role
- Meetings should be planned well in advance
- Try to vary the meeting venue around the country to balance the travelling distance for each person attending
- Always have an agenda to work through – it will keep the meeting focused
- Allow plenty of time to ask for items to be added to the agenda and circulate well in advance
- Where necessary ask for written reports as well as verbal feedback. This helps to keep accurate records
- Agree a time limit for the meeting

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Making meetings effective

When looking at how to make your committee meetings more effective consider the following:

- try to keep to the point when discussing items and allow everyone to contribute
- each member's point of view should be respected
- ensure that individual responsibility for any task agreed at the meeting is understood and accepted
- where possible use sub-committees to deal with specific tasks such as organising a family day
- if a decision cannot be reached about a specific issue agree a time limit for it to be discussed at a later date
- where an important decision has to be made before the next planned meeting explore other methods of communicating such as organising a conference call between the relevant committee members
- make sure that the minutes taken are an accurate record of the meeting before circulating

Example agenda

Meeting of the *** Syndrome Support Group**

Saturday 5th October, 2pm

Agenda

Welcome and introductions

Apologies for absence

1. Minutes of the last meeting

2. Organisation of Family Day

3. Fundraising

a) planned events

b) funding applications

4. Reports

a) Parent Contact

b) Treasurer

c) Newsletter Editor

d) Fundraising co-ordinator

5. Any other business

6. Date of next meeting

The role of the chairperson

The chairperson has an important role in ensuring the smooth running and effectiveness of the committee. It is essential that meetings are managed efficiently and that there is good communication and relationships with all members of the committee.

The experience of each committee member will be different and this can be a source of strength but may also, on occasions, create difficulties. Try to resolve any conflict within the committee as quickly as possible to minimise the risk of a damaging effect on the running of the group.

When chairing meetings don't forget:

- be careful about timing – allow plenty of time for discussion but have a definite end time for the meeting and do not over run.
- invite everyone involved to put forward their point of view and do not allow one person to dominate the meeting
- allow open debate – everyone should be allowed to contribute to the discussion without fear of being unfairly challenged
- when discussing important items ensure that everyone has all the relevant information
- try to keep the debate balanced – if you wish to participate as an advocate for one point of view on a major item hand the chair to someone else
- make sure that each item is concluded before moving on: summarise the decision and ensure that action points are recorded in the minutes
- at the end of the meeting agree the date and venue of the next meeting

Dealing with difficult issues

As the membership grows the group may find that it has to deal with difficult issues. These might be inappropriate contacts, families with difficult personal circumstances and conflict within the committee. In most cases the problem can be easily dealt with but occasionally the group may find itself in a situation that is more difficult to resolve. The following guidelines may help:

- tackle problems as soon as they arise rather than leaving them to solve themselves
- where possible use committee meetings to discuss difficult issues, but if you do not have a committee that meets regularly then seek advice from Contact a Family
- avoid responding to a difficult issue in the heat of the moment – if it cannot be dealt with properly in committee work out how best to deal with it e.g. writing rather than telephoning
- establish ways of communicating regularly with other members of the committee between meetings, for example by organising conference calls. (For further information see the Contact a Family Group Action Pack guide *Telephone Conferencing*.)
- avoid dealing with difficulties on an individual basis – it can help to get other points of view
- do not feel pressurised into making individual decisions that may affect the group without prior discussion with other members of the committee
- avoid becoming individually involved in personal criticism – response to this should come collectively from the committee
- seek advice from other sources or organisations where necessary – the Contact a Family group development service is happy to advise

This guide is part of the Contact a Family Group Action Pack. For more information please visit www.cafamily.org.uk or telephone 020 7608 8700.

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