

**SUMMER 2020**



# Your Guide to Facilitating Virtual Meetings



Family Councils Ontario



# **Introduction**

Meetings play an important role in effective Family Councils. They provide Council members the opportunity to share information and get to know other families, friends, and persons of importance to residents of a long-term care home. Unfortunately, without someone to lead the discussion, meetings can get side tracked, feel like they are dragging on, and fail to accomplish the stated goal or objective.

COVID-19 triggered a disruption in the ways that Family Councils work. This resource is intended to provide ideas to help your Council continue its work through the pandemic as you shift from in-person to virtual meetings. Keep in mind Council members have different levels of comfort with using technology. Seek their input when choosing the specific format for your Virtual meetings. Offer alternatives (i.e. phone calls, e-mails) to keep those who are unable to participate informed and engaged with your Council.

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# What is Facilitation?

**Facilitation is a form of leadership.** When it comes to Family Council Meetings, facilitators have the opportunity to inspire participation, to inform the structure, and set the expectations for participation during a Council meeting.

Facilitators help in the creation of the meeting environment. Beyond the physical or virtual space where your Council meets, it is also about developing practices for efficient meetings, recognizing that family members are busy with limited of time for Council meetings. Ideally you want to create a setting that is inclusive and welcoming.

The following skills are important when facilitating a meeting:

- (a) Listening Skills
- (b) Understanding
- (c) Respect
- (d) Neutrality
- (e ) Assertiveness.



# Skills to Facilitate a Virtual Meeting

## Listening

To make sure all participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas, you will need to engage in **active listening**. Pay attention to what they are saying as well as their tone of voice. This can be challenging in an online environment with the potential for technical issues (i.e. audio to cut in, issues with microphones) and background noise. Make sure to set ground rules, asking those who are not speaking to mute. Give gentle reminders of the rules when you have trouble hearing the discussion. If you are unable to address the technical issues, make use of the chat box to help check your understanding.

## Understanding

This is where you will draw on your knowledge of the long-term care home, current areas of concern within the long-term care sector, and overall goals of your Family Council. How does the current topic or meeting agenda help your Council work towards your goals? Use this information to help you structure the meeting, set and reinforce the expectations for behaviour.



## Respect

Respect is key to ensure all Council members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and concerns with the group. You want to ensure that you use your Council's **Code of Conduct** or create **meeting rules**. To remind participants of the expectations, include these when sharing your meeting agenda. You can also spend time at the start of the meeting to remind participants of the expectations or 'norms' for your meeting.

## Neutrality

Neutrality is key to ensure you hear all potential solutions to an issue. Avoid taking a specific side, or favouring one side by allowing them more opportunity to speak up during the meeting. When you do want to share your own thoughts, make sure that you make it clear that you are expressing your own opinion. To help you remain neutral when addressing behaviours during meetings, you want to use your Council's **Code of Conduct** or **meeting rules**.

## Assertiveness

To make sure that your meeting remains efficient and that the other participants follow the rules, you will need to be confident in your decisions. Don't be afraid or hesitate to speak up and intervene. To do this with confidence, you will need to know **When & Why** you would step in. You will also need to know **What** you will say. Spend some time thinking of these situations before the meeting so you will feel prepared to step in as needed.



## Things to Consider

- **How is facilitation of benefit to your Council meetings?**
- **What are the characteristics of an effective facilitator?**
- **What issues or behaviours prevent progress during a Council meeting?**



## Goals for Facilitation

The ultimate goal of facilitation is to make it easier for Council members to work together. To do this, you want to help the group discuss their concerns. This discussion helps your Council set your Council goals. It is important for Councils to set goals that are realistic about what can be accomplished.

At the end of each Council meeting, everyone involved should be able to identify what you accomplished. Council members should also feel that what they shared was useful to the discussion, and that attending the meeting was not a waste of their time.



# Best Practices: Facilitating a Virtual Meeting

## Plan Ahead

It is natural to feel nervous when asked to lead a meeting. The best way to ease your anxiety and start the meeting feeling confident is to plan ahead. Use the "**Virtual Meeting Preparation Checklist**" as a tool to help you plan ahead for your meetings. This checklist will help make sure that you don't waste anyone's time during your meetings.



**\*\* Tip- Create a FAQ sheet with information about how to download the meeting platform and instructions to log on for the meeting.**

**\*\* Tip- Share contact information for the person providing technical support for your meeting.**



## Delegate Roles

Recruit other Council members to support you as you lead a meeting. To make sure that everyone knows what to expect, share the specific tasks and expectations for each role. Common roles include: time keeper, technology support, and note-taker.

**\*\* Tip- Use a survey to ask Council members about their skills. Use this information to help you decide who you can approach to take on a specific role .**

# Best Practices: Facilitating a Virtual Meeting

## Promote Participation

Each platform (i.e. Skype, Zoom) offers a unique layout for the features that allow Council members to interact with each other and participate during the meeting. Dedicate the first few minutes of a virtual meeting to explain how members can participate. Help members understand how they can participate in a variety of ways: verbally (mute/unmute), visually (show or hide their camera), and in writing (ask a question and use the chat).



**\*\* Tip- Create a slide with images to show what each button to control a specific feature looks like. Use this as a visual aid when you explain the meeting rules and expectations for participation.**

## Set Expectations for Behaviour

Outline your expectations for behaviour during your meeting. Create a slide dedicated to discussing the meeting rules or norms at the beginning of your virtual meeting. You don't need to start from scratch; use your existing code of conduct or Terms of Reference. Translate the rules for in-person meetings to a virtual setting.

You can also dedicate some time in your first virtual meeting to discuss meeting rules or norms. Seek input from participants to ensure everyone is comfortable sharing their ideas and thoughts during your virtual meetings.

**\*\* Tip- You should have no more than 6 rules.**

**\*\* Tip- You can include your rules at the top of your meeting agenda.**





# Best Practices: Facilitating a Virtual Meeting

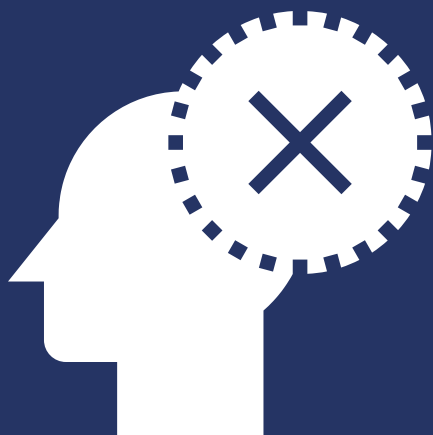
## Make it Interactive

Start each meeting with a virtual ice-breaker (i.e. riddles, poems) or check-in to get people engaged from the start. Ice-breakers help people relax and settle in before you start your formal agenda. You can adapt activities used during in-person meetings to your virtual setting. You can also boost interaction during your meeting making use of features that allow you to ask questions/polls.



**\*\* Tip- Create a slide with a series of topics or questions and allow Council members to share their thoughts and exchange ideas. This is a great way to brainstorm solutions for collective issues/concerns.**

## Learn from Mistakes



Be kind to yourself and don't expect your meetings to always go as planned. Remember, virtual meetings are something new to you and to your Council. After each meeting, take some time to reflect on what went well and what could be improved. Don't be afraid to ask Council members for their feedback. Take note of any issues/problems that you encountered during a meeting and think of strategies to prevent them for your next meeting.

**\*\* Tip- Keep a notebook or journal to record your thoughts. This will help you capture the progress made and keep a record of the reasoning behind any of your decisions tied to virtual meetings for your Family Council.**



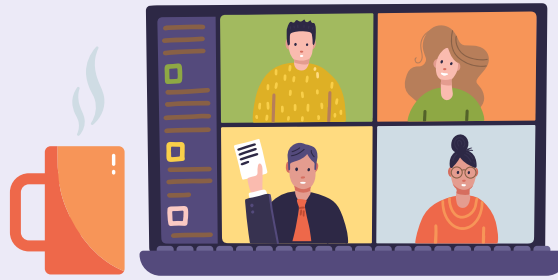
## **Behaviours in a Virtual Meeting**

During an in-person meeting, you can use body language and facial expressions to help understand how participants feel throughout the discussion. While you can use cameras to see participants in a virtual meeting, unfortunately, it's not the same as when you are sitting in the same room. Luckily, there are other cues that you can use to help you understand and manage participant behaviours during a virtual meeting. Pay attention to their tone of voice, as well as to their level of participation in the discussion. Make use of built in features (i.e. chat box) to help support your understanding of how others are responding to the discussion.

When facilitating a meeting, it is important to remember that this behaviour does not indicate an issue with the individual participant (as the only issue), rather, they highlight an issue within the group. If you fail manage disruptive behaviour, then you risk reinforcing this behaviour at the expense of trust and level of engagement of the others attending the meeting. The problem behaviours outlined here are disruptive to the flow of the meeting and trigger a sense of frustration among the other participants as well as by those facilitating the meeting. On the bright side, the responsibility to manage problem behaviours during the meeting is something that the Chair/Lead can share with each participant. Remember, If you fail manage disruptive behaviour, you risk reinforcing this behaviour at the expense of trust and level of engagement of the others during this meeting and in your future meetings.

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## Behaviours You May Encounter in a Virtual Meeting

1. The Dominator
2. The Naysayer
3. The Quiet One
4. The Storyteller
5. The Complainer
6. The Questioner

It is important to note that challenging behaviours can occur in both in-person or virtual Council meetings. The information outlined in this document expands on what is covered on pages 66-70 in the existing **"Your Guide to Starting and Maintaining a Family Council."**

## The Dominator (A.K.A. The Monopolizer)

You may think this is the ideal meeting participant as they are willing to talk, however in reality this is the type of participant that takes over the conversation. They are the first to speak up when given the opportunity, share their thoughts in detail and have an idea or opinion about everything. Their voice is dominant within the discussion, taking up valuable time during meetings. They may be impatient and begin to talk over others to have their thoughts and ideas heard. If you don't take action, this participant will take control of meeting.

## **Why do they behave this way?**

While you may assume that they love to hear themselves talk and do not care about what others have to say, there are many reasons they are so active in the discussion. They may be anxious about being in a quiet room, they may also want to speak up for others who are too shy to share their ideas in the group. They may be excited by the topic of discussion and want to share their ideas as soon as possible. They may be the type of person who likes to think out loud and bounce ideas off others in the group. Alternatively, they may also be the type of person that likes to be the centre of attention and showing off.

## **What you can do.**

The most effective way to manage this type of behaviour when facilitating a meeting is to thank them for their participation and comments. You can also summarise what they said and then try to engage others in the discussion, try saying ***“We’ve been primarily hearing from one or two people. I’m interested in hearing some additional comments from the rest of you”***. Alternatively, if you know they will continue to speak even after trying to get others involved, ***be more direct and say “Thank you [insert name]. You have made some interesting comments. Now, I would like to give some of the others the opportunity to speak”***.

Another effective way to address this behaviour is to **remind participants of the meeting rules**, specifically the **importance of balancing the “speaking and listening”** so you can refer to this expectation as a gentle way to remind them to let others share their thoughts. You can also **assign them to serve in a specific role during the meeting** to help them channel their energy. They may be the best person to record the meeting minutes.

## **The Naysayers**

This term refers to a meeting participant who argues with every detail, whether big or small during Council meetings. They don't set out to argue with a specific person, they argue with everyone.

While some conflict and debate is helpful to promote creativity in your Council, too much conflict can prevent other members from sharing their thoughts during a meeting.



## **Why do they behave this way?**

It is important to remember that they are not necessarily arguing because they disagree. They may see the benefit of exploring all possible options and the need for someone to take on the role of questioning the benefits and logic behind each course of action before they commit their support. They may also be frustrated and be working through their frustration as they participate in the discussion. They may be unintentional in taking things out on others in the conversation and may be unaware of the impact of their behaviour on others and on the group as a whole. They may not get along well with all members of the Council based on past events either within the Council or within the long-term care home.

It may simply be that they have a personality that does not mesh well with those of other Council members. Their behaviour may also stem from their sense of frustration with how the discussion and meeting are going, they may feel like others are dominating the conversation and getting more attention. They begin to behave the way they do to get more attention and shift the focus away from others and onto their own interests and needs.

## **What you can do.**

Remember, some debate between Council members is helpful but you don't want to allow things to get out of hand. **Keep the specific goal or issue that is being discussed as the focus for the conversation** and don't worry too much about the differences in personality. You want to allow members with different perspectives to feel comfortable speaking up and sharing their thoughts. As they share their thoughts, you will **summarize the discussion by highlighting the areas of agreement, while ignoring the points of disagreement**. When debates transform into arguments, you can **be direct and ask that the member(s) stop arguing. Refer to your group rules, and Council Code of Conduct. Let the group know how you are feeling using an "I" statements such as "I feel very disappointed when I hear such bitter remarks."**

If the anger is directed to you as the person leading the conversation, then acknowledge it and ask them directly if they have an issue with the Council or feels that their needs are not being met. **Do not shift to defending yourself, instead open to door to having a private conversation with them and share how their negative outlook is impacting the Council.**

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## The Quiet One

This refers to a participant who does not speak up or say anything during the meeting. You don't know if they are shy, or if they are not interested in the topic.

### ***Why do they behave this way?***

Don't assume they don't have anything to add to the discussion. They may be quiet because they are listening to the discussion as they formulate their thoughts before they share them with the group. They may also be waiting for an invitation to share their ideas with the group. They may be hesitant to share their idea if they feel uncomfortable with the discussion, or if they sense that not all opinions and ideas shared in the discussion are valued.

### ***What you can do.***

To help make all participants comfortable giving their input, **start the meeting with a reminder of the rules. Opening the meeting with a brief check in, allowing each member the opportunity to speak** is another way to empower them to feel their voice is being heard.

Make use of features in the online platform to **send them a private message to let them know you would love to hear their thoughts**. Sending them a message is also helpful to encourage them to continue to participate if they were cut off by another participant. You can also **encourage members to use the Q & A, or to post a comment anonymously so their ideas can be part of the discussion**. Make sure you **thank members for sharing their thoughts**. Before moving on to a new topic or the next item on the agenda, ask them ***"Is there anyone else who want to speak who has not had the opportunity"***. If your group is smaller, you can also call on members by name, however this is something that should only be used as a last resort when you have tried to include them in the discussion using all of the other potential techniques.

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## **The Storyteller (A.K.A.- The Rambler)**

This type of participant views meetings as a social opportunity where they can enjoy their time and share their stories during meetings. While their story may begin on topic, as it unfolds it strays off topic. At times, their story will introduce a number of topics during their story.

### ***Why do they behave this way?***

While they may only be focused on sharing their story for their own interest, they may be the type of person who enjoys building excitement before sharing their argument. They may be unaware of the information needed to provide input when discussing the topic, so rather than remain quiet they share something they feel is relevant. Don't assume they are malicious in their intent to get the conversation off topic; they may have a different goal for the meeting. They may also be the type of person who enjoys sharing stories and being in the company of others.

### ***What you can do.***

To help make sure everyone agrees on the outcome for the meeting, start by reviewing the agenda and the main goal for discussion. Refer to your Council's Terms of Reference if you have one, **how does this meeting support your Council in working towards your specific goals?** For those who enjoy talking, create a group norm/rule stating that each member of the Council has the opportunity to make a comment or allow each member a set amount of time to share their idea. Assign someone in the meeting the role of time keeper to help keep everyone on track.

Thank a participant for their ideas and then summarize the relevant points they shared to help re-focus the discussion. If they continue to ramble and go off topic, gently remind them of the agenda and the specific item you under discussion. Throughout the meeting, remind members of the meeting agenda and the outlined time, task and structure so you accomplish the work you need within the specific time frame requested from your Council members.

**If you note members enjoy the opportunity to socialize, schedule some dedicated time for that purpose either before or after your formal Council meeting.**



## The Complainer

You will know if you have this type of participant early on in a meeting. They will start the meeting with a negative attitude. They often blame others, and focus on the negative. They present the most resistance to any changes or alternative points of view. During discussions their input won't help in making a decision, and they will be vocal when dissatisfied with the decision(s) made

### ***Why do they behave this way?***

It is important you don't take what they say during a meeting or towards you as the person leading the meeting personally. They may simply see meetings as a context for peer support and need an outlet to voice their frustration. They may be unhappy about something unrelated to the current topic of discussion on the agenda or they may have a real reason to complain.

### ***What you can do.***

As peer support is one of the possible goals of a Family Council, it is important that you listen to what they have to say. **You want this member to feel like they are heard.** Allow them to share their thoughts, then continue to build on the issue(s) they have raised. **Be solution-focused, specifically ask the group to provide input on how they can address the issue(s) raised.** Once they feel their concern(s) have been heard, ask if there are other members of your council who relate to the issue(s) raised. **If the issue(s) relate only to that member of the Council, then direct them to the department and staff to approach.** When you provide them with the next steps to take, they will provide less resistance as you move on to discuss other topics. **If and when their complaint(s) are about the Family Council, arrange a time to speak with them privately.** Get all the details needed and try to provide them with some solutions. If needed, you can discuss the specific issue(s) during your next Council meeting.

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## The Questioner

Refers to participants who will repeatedly ask questions, taking up the bulk of time dedicated to discussion during a meeting for a specific topic. Pay careful attention to their questions, while they may begin with on topic questions, eventually their questions may veer off topic.

### ***Why do they behave this way?***

This type of participant may ask questions because they are excited to learn about the topic and the issue being discussed. If you invite a guest speaker to attend a meeting, they may have a genuine interest in learning more about the topic. Another possible explanation for the volume of questions they ask comes from their limited knowledge and fear of not understanding the issue when it comes to making a decision. They will ask questions to help inform their vote when asked to make a decision. When participants ask a question that is off topic, it may indicate that they were distracted, or perhaps having a technical issue on their end.

### ***What you can do.***

If you have a strict time frame to discuss a topic or for a guest speaker to present to your group, you can make the most of the time you have by **requesting all Council members keep their questions until the end of the discussion/presentation.** You can gently re-direct their focus and remind them of your tight time frame by saying "***We only have a limited amount of time and that question will be addressed later on,***" or share that "***we will record all the questions shared in the chat box, we will provide answers to any unanswered questions and include them with the meeting minute.***"

To help keep their focus during a meeting, you can **assign them to a specific role** i.e. taking meeting minutes, time keeper.

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# Tips for Managing Meeting Behaviour

## ***DON'T IGNORE BEHAVIOURS***

Act as soon as you notice a participant demonstrates problematic behaviour. The longer you allow a problem behaviour to continue, the greater the risk to others who are following the rules. Those who are following the rules are often frustrated by others who engage in problem behaviours. The flow of your meeting and the discussion are also disrupted by the presence of problem behaviour.



## ***INVESTIGATE THE UNDERLYING CAUSE***

Begin by asking yourself WHY are they demonstrating this behaviour? Is there a difference in how they conducted themselves during your in-person meetings and virtual meeting?



## ***REMEMBER PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR IS UNINTENTIONAL***

When someone displays problematic behaviour in a virtual meeting, it's not personal. Don't assume that the participant is the source of the problem. Ask yourself the following questions: Do they frequently display this behaviour? Does this behaviour happen at a specific time in your meeting? Is it the same person demonstrating the problematic behaviour? Before the behaviour becomes something regular it must be addressed with respect and patience. Send them a private message to remind them of the rules. Let them know you are happy to connect with them to discuss their concern in more detail one-on-one after the meeting.



# Strategies to Manage Challenging Behaviours

The platform you use for Virtual Meetings has some features that will help you to address challenging behaviours.

## Mute All

- Dominator
- Naysayer
- Storyteller
- Complainer
- Questioner



## Raised Hand

- The Quiet One
- Questioner



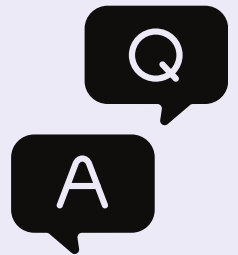
## Chat Box

- The Quiet One
- Questioner



## Q & A

- The Quiet One
- Questioner



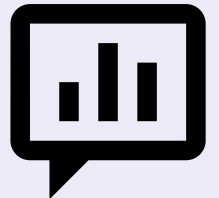
## Private Message

- Dominator
- Naysayer
- Storyteller
- Complainer
- Questioner
- The Quiet One



## Polls

- Dominator
- Naysayer
- Storyteller
- Complainer
- Questioner
- The Quiet One



Not all platforms will include the features listed above. Review the features included in the platform you use for details on what is available and how to use those features.





## Family Councils Ontario

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