

Challenging Meetings

Many of us have experienced a meeting that can be characterized as challenging. Even though we enter a meeting with strength-based intentions, we cannot control the intentions or concerns that other team members have.

Youth and family members may have attended meetings in the past where they have felt shamed, blamed, and judged. These experiences may have impacted them in such a way that every meeting is approached with anxiety and insecurity. It is important to be proactive with these situations by exploring concerns to clear the air before the team meeting. We want to let everyone know that all meetings are safe and there will be expectations agreed upon by the team.

Individuals can be redirected when focus is lost during a meeting. This can be done by reframing what is being said into “need” statements. These needs can be added to the plan to talk about in future meetings. The Parking Lot can be used for the agenda and items to be discussed in future meetings letting the team member know that you value their ideas but you want to move the meeting forward. Return to their agenda before ending the meeting.

As a Facilitator it is important to ensure that there is a productive meeting. Working with individuals that have different ideas regarding what a family should do or be can be very challenging. When bringing a team together, it is one of our skill sets to develop ground rules. Ground rules are developed by the team to help guide how the team will function. Ground rules can include issues regarding confidentiality and decision-making. Ground rules may include other topics based on the team composition and potential challenges. Youth and family members are encouraged to add in safety measures. When dealing with challenges in a meeting it is vital to redirect the team back to the ground rules. If there are no ground rules to deal with the situation, you may want to ask the team to take a short break to manage the situation. After the situation is resolved and the meeting is continued, ask the team how they would want to handle this situation in the future. If agreed upon, add to the ground rules. Similar to the Discovery process, you can add to the ground rules throughout the process, if agreed upon by the team. Having ground rules around taking a break if things get heated is a good way to avoid confrontation or de-escalate a situation before you get to any of the below situations. Rely on your Support Partners to prep the family and youth prior to the meeting.

Team Decision-Making

It is important to discuss and determine rules about how decisions will be made in order for voices to be heard and respect to be maintained in team meetings. Be proactive. Do this at the first team meeting or shortly afterwards, when everyone is thinking logically. This is similar to doing a prevention/crisis plan before the behaviors occurs. Lead the discussion on how the team will make decisions. Here are some examples of decision that may need to be made at the first team meeting:

- When a break is needed
- YSP and youth txt responses during meetings
- When to stop a meeting and reschedule for another day
- How long meets are to be
- How to maximize youth and family voice

- How to promote safety for all
- When ground rules are not being respected

Ideas a HFW workforce member can do during a heated meeting.

- Support partners, insure youth and family's voice is being heard
- Utilize a warning, or two
- Have the team take a break in order for individuals to calm down
- Have the team reschedule the meeting

Challenging Issues

1. Team members in a verbal argument:

The culture of the family is very important. You may or may not agree with team members arguing. There are families that raise their voices when discussing certain topics. This may be a way that they communicate. It would be up to the team to decide how team members are going to communicate and what is or is not acceptable. If a family's culture is to raise their voices, HFW workforce members may want to caution family about system partners on the team and what their reaction may look like. Once again this will be up to the team to decide on. Always strive to achieve the best way to effectively communicate and have a productive team meeting.

2. Team members in a physical argument:

At this point you want to ensure safety. You do not want to get between individuals physically assaulting one another. There may be individuals who can calm the participants down. If the physical confrontation continues, remove remaining team members from room and follow agency policy and procedures manual.

3. Team member feels undervalued:

A team member could feel undervalued and the HFW workforce may not realize it. A team member that is not showing up or no longer gives input during brainstorming ideas could be feeling that their input is undervalued. The team member may have made a suggestion and it wasn't heard or noted, or that the team has decided to go in a direction that this individual doesn't agree with. Talk with the HFW workforce members and decide who should approach this team member. This can be resolved outside the team meeting if necessary, depending on circumstances. It is important to understand what feeling valued looks like for the team members. The key is that all team members feel a part of the team and their thoughts and ideas are being valued.

4. Team member has bias toward someone or something:

Bias can affect a team's success. When a team member is showing bias toward someone or something a HFW workforce member needs to talk to the individual. Understanding the culture of the youth and family is necessary in these situations. While trying to understand their point of view, talk about team cohesion and why it is important to have everyone working together for the family. Ask if they agree with the team mission and what can they do to help achieve it. Be careful not to make them feel shamed or blamed. If this individual continues to insist on their expressing their bias, the team's decision on how to deal with this situation needs to be implemented.

5. Blaming/Shaming:

One of the components of the Theory of Change is self-efficacy. Team members may attempt to belittle the family or other team members. They may lecture them about responsibilities. This can impact a youth and/or family member's efforts to achieve self-efficacy. These team members can be very destructive to the process. It is equally important that we do not engage in or allow blame/shame of any team members, whether it is from the youth and/or family.

One of our responsibilities in team meetings is to create a safe environment for everyone. If not handled correctly you may lose team members and possibly the family. We struggle with the family agreeing to invite potential team members to the meetings because of fear they will be blamed by that person. It is important to show the family that we are sincere when we state the rule of "*No Blame/No Shame*". If this happens refer back to the information from #4 above regarding bias.

6. Team member(s) with other agendas:

Team members may come into the meetings with a hidden agenda, such as getting the team to agree to an out-of-home placement for the youth, or to close the case. The workforce members must address this in a proactive manner by identifying those who may have a hidden agenda. This can be accomplished by polling the team members to see what they want out of the meeting. Their issues can be identified at the beginning of the meeting so that the team can decide if they want to address them. Or, the team member can be asked to set aside their agenda because it conflicts with the current direction of the team.

Team members can have a different opinion of what the youth and family should be doing or working on. Because one of our HFW principles is team-based, we want to value every team member's ideas. Another principle is family voice and choice. There should be a balance between all the HFW principles. No one principle is more important than the other. Family voice means that the team is actively listening to the youth and families to understand their vision of a good future, the things that must change for them to achieve it, and their strengths along with their culture. Choice refers to providing youth and families with options so they (youth and family) can choose what works best for their family. Team-based is including everyone on the team to develop the plans. It is the skill of the Facilitator to lead a discussion on needs and to agree upon the need as a team.

If a team member does not want to work on the identified need, the team must return to their ground rules and the decision that was made to handle this situation. If they become frustrated or begin to disrupt the meeting, take a break or put into action protocols the team has agreed upon. One of the HFW workforce members will need to check in with this team member after the meeting. Make sure they are in agreement and that their opinions are being valued. Reassure them that their need will be considered at the next team meeting. If the team member continues to have problems with the need selected, remind them of the team's ground rules.

There is the possibility that the person disagreeing might be the youth or family member. This can be more difficult because you cannot have meetings without them, and you need to have 'buy-in' from them. The youth and family members are part of the team and they too have agreed upon how these situations will be handled by the team. The roles of the FSP and YSP are very important in this situation. Explain why others are asking to work on this need. The youth or family may feel blamed or shamed at this point. Reassure them that you will not allow this to happen. Whatever the reason, let them know you are there to support them and for the team to hear their voice. If they continue to disagree on the need then you may want to put it on hold and come back to it another time. You can talk about it between meetings to get a deeper understanding of their reluctance.

7. Ground rules are not being followed:

This was referenced in team decision-making. Workforce members need to be skillful when dealing with circumstances that interfere with team cohesion and the family's success. Address these situations quickly so the team will know there will be limited tolerance for not following the ground rules. Team members will feel more open to share or take action steps because they know that the meetings will be facilitated with the previously agreed-upon ground rules.

8. Youth/Family selects ideas that another team member disagrees with:

Team members may feel strongly about a particular brainstormed option. They may give reasons why they believe it to be a good idea. This is acceptable, but when team members cannot agree on a brainstormed option, the Facilitator will need to interject. To have true choice, the youth and family needs to pick the ideas that fit better with their strengths and culture. When youth and families have the opportunity to select what their plan looks like, it has a greater chance to be successful.

Unfortunately, family members are often given voice and choice up to the point that the system partner disagrees with the family. In the early stages of High Fidelity Wraparound in a community, many team members who don't understand the value of family and youth voice and choice will be shocked to discover HFW's commitment to youth- and family-driven. The Facilitator is the person who stands up for the values of the HFW process and has to up hold all 10 principles. This means valuing system mandates and being team based while honoring family voice and choice. One does not trump the other.

9. Team member feels that the team is not working on the TRUE need:

This concern parallels with a team member having different ideas for the family. Team members may get frustrated with the team working on needs that they know or feel are not the true need. This could happen with natural support team members who have known the family for an extended time. There may be several reasons why youth and families may not work on the TRUE need. There are times when the family may not see the big picture because of all they need to do to get through each day. A family may be avoiding the TRUE need because it is too painful to face. There will come a point in the process that the plans are not successful because the TRUE need is not being worked on. At this time the youth and family need to be supported through this. A HFW workforce member may need to talk with the youth/family about their avoidance of the TRUE need. We need to be persistent and show unconditional care at this point. Depending on the relationship, natural supports may be more successful speaking about this than a HFW workforce member. There are going to be times when the youth or family does not want to expose the need, although it may be necessary for the team's success. Formal HFW may end until the family is ready to deal with this need.

10. Team member(s) believe that this process does not work:

HFW workforce members need to approach the team member(s) to explore their point of view. Try to determine what success looks like to them and what they feel would be helpful in team meetings. HFW workforce members need to believe that this process could work, and that the Theory of Change will lead to self-efficacy. The main point is to have successful plans, safe and productive meetings, and build team cohesion so youth and families achieve their vision and teams reach their mission.