

LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

Advancing Quality, Dignity & Justice

FAMILY EMPOWERMENT TIPS: FAMILY COUNCIL INDEPENDENCE

Family Councils (FC) are a group of friends and relatives of residents in nursing homes or assisted living who work together to advocate for their loved ones. These groups, whether large or small, serve as a private space for families to voice concerns and work together to find solutions to improve quality of life and resident care.

Privacy and **independence** are vital to a family council's success in advocating for residents. Federal law (CFR 483.10(f)(5)) grants nursing home family councils the right to organize and participate in resident groups **independently** of the facility staff. At the same time, the facility must provide a private meeting space and assist the council in setting up meetings upon request. This page offers guidance for ensuring that a family council's privacy and independence are respected and protected.

Do's and Don'ts for Maintaining Privacy/Independence

Do...

- Set clear privacy and communication rules with your family council.
- Use secure communication for virtual meetings, such as password-protected Zoom rooms.
- Assign a liaison to keep in touch with facility staff.
- If needed, you can ask facility for help setting up meetings. Be sure to maintain autonomy!
- Use your ombudsmen! They can help educate council members, mediate between the council and facility, and ensure your council's independence is respected.

Example: After helping a family council set up a Zoom meeting, a nursing home staff said they wanted to watch to "make sure there's no tech issues." The council then met privately and decided they did not want the staff there. The next day, the council liaison told the staff that under CFR 483.10(f)(5), the council had the right to meet independently, but thanked the staff for helping with the Zoom room.

Don't...

- Share meeting links or confidential matters publicly or in open email chains.
- Allow facility staff to attend meetings and/or direct discussions without permission.
- Share meeting minutes or names of attendees with staff (even if they ask nicely).
- Discuss private matters in public.
- Record meetings without consent of family council and/or share recordings with staff.

Visit bit.ly/fam-council-room to set up a private and secure Zoom room for your family council. Learn more about family councils at nursinghome411.org/families or contact us at families@ltccc.org.