

Cork Kerry - Chairing Skills: Dealing with Difficult Group Dynamics.

Issue	Solution
The meeting may involve professionals who have nothing to contribute or work against a problem solving approach.	Careful consideration should be made as to which services can contribute to the care plan in a productive way. Having too many people present who can not actively contribute can work to undermine the usefulness of the meeting. Initial conversations on the phone may indicate whether attendance from an agency is required. Case meetings should be held only when necessary and require careful planning.
Professionals are not focused on solution finding.	Keep the session tightly structured: 1) Introduce and provide context – what are you aiming for from the meeting. You may wish to create a group contract focusing on communications and aims. 2) Get service reports / updates from each representative (overview and recommendations for the future) – keep to a tightly managed round. If the conversation moves into discussion or disagreement before everyone has talked about what they can offer or what their concerns are, it may make solution finding difficult. 3) If people are not able to focus on finding positive solutions then it may be useful to bring them back to the initial aims of the meeting.
There is an overly negative focus on aspects of the case	If a participant is focusing on negative aspects of the case, it may be necessary highlight the service user’s strengths or awareness of the situation. <i>‘I think its important that we acknowledge that Sam has identified that she has not been attending as much as needed and will prioritise this from now on, what could we do to support this.....</i>
Workers are concerned about taking on more work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Discuss the fact that this is a holistic process for service users and if effective should be more time efficient.- Refer to involvement as ‘smarter work’, not necessarily ‘more work’.
Inappropriate venue and environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Discuss where the service user would feel comfortable.- If the chosen venue is not the service user’s first choice then ensure that reasons are explained to the service user, i.e. on occasion the meeting will need to suit certain professionals who are not able to travel, i.e. doctors etc.
Difficulties in synchronising people when calling a meeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Email and follow up by phone call.- If necessary organise meeting around ‘key-players’.- It may be wise to check the availability of the most significant agency before informing other people of prospective dates.

Bad note keeping or record keeping.

- **Ensure agenda is relevant to the case, specific to the issues that need to be addressed and is checked off item by item before the meeting is complete.**
- **Ensure minutes are concise records of decisions and next step actions on agenda items– not a record of all discussions.**
- **Use a care plan structure for minutes, i.e. action, person responsible, date and review.**
- **Clarify decisions at end of meeting, by reading out the notes, all to agree on wording.**
- **If people leave before the end of the meeting then seek agreement that they will read minutes and email any feedback.**
- **Minutes should be written and sent ASAP**
- **All participants should be emailed, with a read receipt function on the email (go to options and tick the read receipt box).**
- **It can be helpful for someone other than the chair to take minutes.**

Case manager is not chairing the meeting

- **Where the Case Manager is not chairing the meeting i.e. someone more experienced is happy to do it, then the CM should take minutes and ensure these are sent out.**
- **If the chair does not allow sufficient time for clarification of decisions the minute taker should ask to read out the list of decisions and ensure all agree to wording.**

Information is disclosed which is in breach of confidentiality guidelines, i.e. ‘I was told this in confidence....’

- **Remind all of the guidelines for confidentiality.**
- **In a respectful fashion, remind participants that information should be ignored if it is in breach of confidentiality. Care should be taken where possible to ensure that points are made respectfully, possibly by talking in the abstract i.e.**
‘perhaps we should not discuss the point raised about issue B, as it was disclosed in confidence, although considering the facts we have, can we come up with a plan....’
 - **Remind all that only information relevant to the issue needs to be discussed. One technique is to draw people back to the agenda:**
‘to ensure that we address all of the points we need to look at today, could I just draw us back into the agenda, the issues we are looking at now are.....’
 - **If the confidentiality is breached by a non-professional (i.e. family member), inform them of ‘meeting rules’ and why these are in place. It may also be useful at some point to call a break and then discuss this in private so that the reasons are understood and the person leaves feeling like an equal contributor to the meeting.**

The service user does not turn up at the case meeting.

- Generally the meeting can go ahead as the service user has given permission for the meeting to occur. In this case the outcomes will need to be agreed with the service user before these are considered to be finalised.
- It is especially important in this circumstance that the case manager uses a very consultative approach to ensure that the service user is not pressured into agreeing to the professional recommendations.

One agency considers there to be no need for a meeting to take place.

- Case meetings should be held only when necessary and require careful planning.
- This need for and reasons for the meeting should be sent around by email to all required participants and followed up by phone call.
- If cooperation is not forthcoming and there is a clear need for involvement then it may be necessary to send in a Blocks and Gaps form to the local coordinator.

Service providers disagree on significant points

- If a facilitated discussion does not arrive at a useful compromise or understanding then the workers may need to arrange a time outside of the meeting to discuss these differences.
- The chair may need to point out professional boundaries if it is felt that this is needed.
- To encourage service user focus, the chair may need to re-frame the issue or question from the service user's point of view.
- Make sure silent participants have an opportunity to contribute; their views may break a stalemate.

The service user is not being included in discussions.

- Ask directly for the service user's input and feedback. If the service user is having trouble explaining their views, then break it down into a number of open questions;
- *'what do you think of the plan,' 'is that summary what you recall happening', 'do you feel happy that the what has been agreed is....'*
- If discussions are particularly tense or dense it may be useful to request a short break so you can check with the service user and ensure that they are happy with how it is going, as they may not be able to raise their own issues within the context of the meeting.
- Acknowledge the attendance and contributions of the service user. Their participation in the meeting itself is a significant

The information being discussed is not based on fact.

There is an overly negative tone to the meeting or professionals are not being solution focused.

Professionals leave the meeting early

commitment and strength that can be worked with.

- **Clarify the position: ‘*just to clarify, was it that particular action witnessed by a staff member etc*’**
- **Ask for the service user’s view.**
- **It may be useful to interrupt overly long or negative explanations of someone’s ones ‘past failures’ by summarising the service position;**
- **‘*so if I could summarise the agency position on what has happened so far, you have not been able to make any progress due to missed meetings and the main issue now is the need to get commitment that the next meeting will take place....*’**
- **Ask for a short round of suggestions for next step solutions.**
- **If it feels that there is a particular deadlock, then have a short break and give people a task to come back with solutions.**

Gain clarification before leaving on what they can offer and what follow-up there will be regards minutes and care plan.