

Setting Up and Running an Effective Family Meeting

*Created by Stephanie Filigno, PhD
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PURPOSE

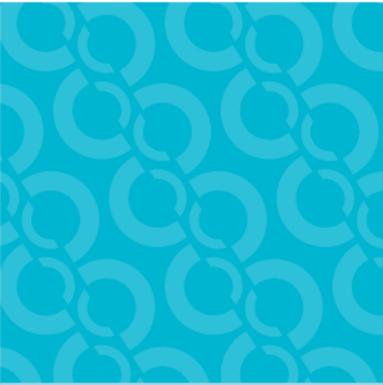
- Keep the lines of communication open
- Foster a greater sense of responsibility within children
- Diffuse sibling rivalry
- Encourage discussion and cooperation
- Build family unity
- Develop listening and positive communication skills

Aim to set aside a period of time each week/month that the whole family can spend constructive, quality time together discussing any concerns and/or issues that need to be discussed. Common topics include:

- Announcements
- Positive recognition
- Complaints and conflict resolution
- The family budget/allowance
- Rules and chores
- Plans for upcoming events (vacations, birthdays, etc.)
- Scheduling and logistics

One of the best ways to plan your family meetings is by taping a piece of paper marked "agenda" to your refrigerator or family work space at the beginning of the week. As the week progresses, any family member can add any issue or complaint that they think of to the agenda.

You can use these family meetings to exchange POSITIVE feedback! Not only does this exchange bring about good feelings, but it also identifies behaviors that you want to see and teaches family members the importance of "building each other up." And you don't have to use family meetings solely for problem solving. It is also a great way just to get together regularly as a family and to talk about other family issues like planning fun activities - vacations, game nights, special dinners, etc. It is essential that family members understand that the focus of the meeting is to RESOLVE problems. It is not to scapegoat, criticize, punish or complain.



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Keep the meeting short and sweet! Consider making the site for your family meeting somewhere new and fun if needed.

You can also use this as a time to discuss the roles and expectations of each family member. Announce plans for upcoming outings, vacations, and/or events. Delegate chores to each family member. Discuss family rules and the consequences for breaking them. Set aside a short period of time to play a game together as a family when the meeting is over.

AGENDA

Review the two main rules that family members must follow during the meetings.

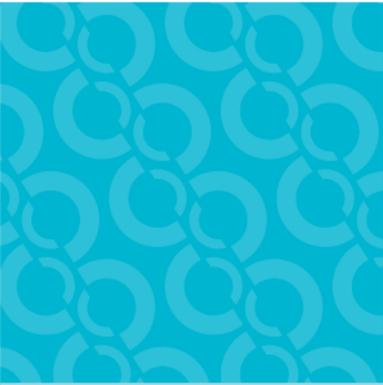
1. Be Respectful of Others (through words and actions)
2. Wait Your Turn to Speak (No Interrupting). May want the person talking get to hold an object that symbolizes that only that person can talk (like a potholder or set a timer).

Identify who is going to do what during the meeting. Assigning roles (secretary/notekeeper) can help children be excited about the meeting.

Next, go around the table and make a list of topics that everyone wants to discuss. You can also have people write them down and put them in a bowl. You can draw them out, or make a plan for how to address them before you start.

THE MEETING

1. Develop a set of "Family Meeting Rules" at your first meeting. Be sure to write them down and follow them during each meeting. Have rules specifically against disrespectful behaviors such as interrupting, insulting, or yelling
2. Have the family meeting at the same time and place each week, allowing for emergency time changes as necessary.
3. Make sure ALL family members are present and have a chance to be heard.
4. Keep the meeting positive! Start your meeting with everyone sharing appreciations. Put all decisions from the meeting in writing.
5. Avoid distractions. Turn off cell phones and make sure there are no TV's or radios on in the vicinity.



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6. Next discuss "Looking forward to" which could include events, meals, etc.
7. End the meeting with announcements that require no planning.
8. Have each family member sign the sheet when the meeting ends.

As a parent, your role is to:

1. Enforce the two rules (catch people being good and praise listening!).
2. Follow the agenda
3. Facilitate the problem solving and brainstorming process by allowing all to talk about possible solutions and then consider voting on the best solution
4. Keep the meeting on task
5. Maintain a positive, solution-focused atmosphere by reflecting back what people say and acknowledging listening, patience, forgiveness, and family values.

An example: "Good job sharing! I like the way you were able to state the problem clearly and in a respectful way. You are frustrated because someone has been going into your room without your permission. Your room is messier than when you left it. You are also missing items from your room and can't find things when you need them."