

FACULTY AND EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Newsletter

More Effective Parenting through Family Meetings

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What is a Family Meeting? It is generally a regularly scheduled opportunity for all family members to sit down together to discuss problems, plan family recreation, make decisions or express concerns. As families are “ripping and running” these days, communication can feel fragmented and connections between members can feel fragile at best. The family meeting can assure that at least once a week, the whole family will sit down together and attend to each other. Aside from the extremely valuable problem solving function of a family meeting, having these regular meetings helps reaffirm the meaningfulness of family relations.

Who should be Involved? All members of the family should be involved, even small children. With some guidance and support a 5 or 6 year old can facilitate the meeting and at very young ages, the children involved learn about communication, organization, respect for others, negotiation and decision-making.

Guidelines for Effective Family Meetings
The first and most important guideline for Successful Family Meetings is **respectful communication**. The definition of respectful communication should be the first item discussed at the first Family Meeting with each member agreeing to try to communicate respectfully and agreeing to be held accountable to this commitment. Children AND parent(s) must agree to communicate respectfully with all the members. This is a powerful process where parents who lecture, dominate, attempt to control or impose their ideas and opinions on the children negate the experience of

discussion, consensus building, listening and being heard.

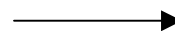
Have **ground rules** such as discussing only one topic at a time, taking turns talking, no “put downs,” no fighting or raised voices and the consequences involved if a member breaks these rules. It is also important that distractions be managed during the meeting so members can focus such as leaving the TV off, no phone calls taken and held not at mealtime.

Meet at a **regularly scheduled time** so that members can plan accordingly to be there, to submit agenda items and to know that their concerns will be addressed. Keep the meeting to the scheduled start and stop times as much as possible.

Typical topics include: vacation planning, chore distribution, upcoming schedule changes, interpersonal concerns, hurt feelings, apologies, congratulations and clarification of family values.



Have an **agenda**. An agenda list can be generated through the week by having it posted in a designated space in the home and anyone can contribute issues for discussion. The person listing a topic takes responsibility for defining the issue at the meeting.



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Take **minutes**. It is important to have a record of the issues discussed, plans and decisions made. These can be posted for review by the family or can be reviewed at the next family meeting. The role of secretary should be rotated.

Who **leads** the meeting? Leadership of the meeting should be rotated so that each member of the family has ample opportunities to be in this role and it should be decided ahead of time who leads this week's meeting. The leader identifies the topics, facilitates discussion, keeps the group focused, ensures everyone has an opportunity to speak, and seeks consensus or final decisions.

Mandatory **attendance**? For truly effective family meetings, all the members should be present for each family meeting so it should be a requirement and a commitment. If a member cannot be present or elects to be absent, it should be understood that decisions might still be made without them or their input.

What is **consensus** and shouldn't parents have the final say? Consensus is a *process* of discussion with various members contributing their opinions, thoughts, and suggestions toward a solution to which everyone can agree.

The parent role in consensus building within the family meeting is to encourage respectful communication, help identify solutions and provide gentle guidance. As in every family, the parent(s) should have the final say but guiding the family toward solutions rather than dictating the bottom line can achieve much more.



Pitfalls to Effective Family Meetings:

- Authoritarian leadership.
- Not listening.
- Lack of follow through on decisions made in the meeting.
- Changing meeting times frequently.
- Focusing on complaints, criticisms and gripes.
- Meeting only to handle a crisis or to address negative behaviors.
- Focusing solely on assignment of tasks and chores.

What do children and adolescents learn from effective family meetings?

- That their opinions are valuable and respected.
- To respect other people's opinions.
- Clarity about the family values in this house.
- That they have the ability to communicate effectively.
- That they have the power to negotiate solutions.
- Accountability for their words and actions.
- That everyone has feelings that can be hurt.
- The value of an apology.
- Acceptance and non-judgmental communication.
- Cooperative decision-making.
- That family is a "we" word, not an "I."

Other resources: [The Parent's Handbook, STEP](#) by Dinkmeyer and McKay; [Common Sense Parenting](#) by Burke and Herron; [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families](#) by Covey; [Positive Discipline for Teenagers](#) by Nelson and Lott; and [Siblings Without Rivalry](#) by Faber and Mazlish.

For further discussion about Family Meetings and other issues, contact the Faculty and Employee Assistance Program at 434-243-2643 for a free and confidential appointment with one of our counselors.