

FAMILY MEETINGS

Getting into the habit of family meetings takes time. Making the meetings work takes effort. Here are some ideas to help you.

Meet at a regular time. A regular time might be once a week. Plan to have the meeting last from twenty minutes to an hour.

Make a list of topics. Some people call this list of topics an agenda. Post it on the refrigerator. Then people can add to it during the days before the meeting. This helps you deal with the things that are important to each person in the family.

Plan the time. At first, you will need to be in charge of this. Look at the meeting list. Decide how much time makes sense for each item on the list. Stick to the time limits.

Take turns being the leader. The leader reads the meeting list and keeps things on track. Still, letting each person in the family have a chance to lead is important. Younger children will need help to do this. That's okay.

Start with compliments and appreciations. Go around the table and give a compliment or appreciation to each person. Everyone gets an opportunity to give and receive validation. (At first, especially for younger children, this may feel awkward. Allow members to pass if they choose)

Take notes. Write down the agreements and plans made in the meeting. These written notes are the minutes. Take turns doing the job of note-taking. Find a place to post the notes so everyone can read them. Some families put them on the refrigerator near the next meeting's agenda. Ask teens and older children to read the notes to younger children who don't read yet.

Let everyone take part. When talking about something on the list, let the young people in the family speak first. This helps them feel responsible.

- If someone hasn't talked, ask, "What do you think?"
- If someone talks too much, stay respectful. You could say, "It sounds like this is important to you. We need to hear how everybody else feels about it."
- If someone is not showing respect, use an I-message: "When I hear name-calling, I get concerned that we won't be able to cooperate."

Limit complaining. Lots of complaining can turn meetings into gripe sessions. This won't solve problems. It won't help families enjoy each other. If complaining is a problem, ask, "What can we do about it? How can we solve the problem?" Remember to listen for feelings and to share yours. When problems arise, explore alternatives.

Cooperate to choose chores. To start, you might want to volunteer for a chore no one likes. You might say: "I'll clean the cat box or the bathroom. Which should I do?" As time goes on, expect others to do some of the unpleasant chores too. Some families take turns doing different chores. Others use a job jar.

Do what you agree to do. Stick to agreements until the next meeting. If people want to change the agreement, they can do it then. Children, teenagers, and parents are expected to do what they agree to do.

What if you forget and break an agreement? What if one day you don't have time to do something you agreed to? Tell your family you are sorry. Say you will work to do a better job. A teenager might sometimes forget or not have time too. No one is perfect.

If broken agreements continue, make a "work before fun" rule: Before people do fun activities, their chores need to be done. The rule applies to parents as well as teens and younger children.

Take time for fun. Meetings are a good way to solve problems and choose chores. But that's not all they are for. To add fun to meetings, talk about good things. Thank each person for some help given during the week. Ask each person to do the same. Ask people to talk about what is good for them right now. This sets a positive tone. It also teaches your children to encourage other people - and themselves.

At the meeting, plan together to do something you all enjoy. You might plan to make home-made pizzas together on Sunday night. Maybe you'll plan to watch a football game together on TV. Some families spend time having fun together right after the meeting. Respect people's busy schedules, though. Teenagers may have other plans for after the meeting.

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