

Family Meetings That Everyone Loves

Ready!

- This unit takes from 30 to 60 minutes depending how much information you cover and time you wish to devote to activities.
- The unit is intended to help parents understand the benefits of and implement family meetings.
- The unit is appropriate for families with children school-aged or older.
- Read or review the unit “Family Meetings That Everyone Loves” from <http://www.arfamilies.org/> You may also wish to review “Communication Through Family Meeting” from Oregon State University Extension Service (<http://eesc.orst.edu/agcomwebfile/edmat/EC1436.pdf>)
- Read through the teaching guide and customize materials to fit your style, objectives, and teaching context.
- You may wish to prepare a sample “Talking Stick” to show group or enough sticks that each group can use one during the group activity.
- Incorporating experiential activities can both lengthen unit and add to the fun. Any activity that illustrates the value of effective communication, clarity in objectives, or unity can be easily linked to a discussion of family meetings. “*Knowledge is Power*” from **Executive Marbles and Other Team-Building Activities** by Sam Sikes is one example. Many other activities will also work. *Note:* Because the activities are copyrighted, they cannot be included in this guide.

Grab!

- Prepare copies of the “Family Meeting Activity Instructions” for each group of 3-5 individuals and the sample “Family Meeting Agenda” for each participant.
- If you plan to evaluate the session, prepare copies of the evaluation instrument.
- If you plan to use the supplementary PowerPoint presentation, load the file and bring the appropriate equipment (LCD projector, Laptop, Extension Cord)
- Grab your “Talking Stick”

Go!

What comes to your mind when you hear the words “family meeting”?

Give several people an opportunity to share what a family meeting means to them.

For many it may bring back memories similar to a police investigation where parents were trying to find out who did it and how they would be punished. But family meetings don’t need to resemble a crime scene. They can be fun, rewarding, and effective. Imagine trying to run a business without developing a plan, organizing efforts, or meeting together to discuss the progress and develop a strategy. What would happen to a business that had several employees with different and perhaps changing roles if they never met together?

[Allow the group time to talk about what meetings do for a business. Try not to let the discussion turn into a discussion of wasting time in ineffective meetings. Ideas might include:

- problems resulting from miscommunication
- employees might have different vision for their roles and responsibilities
- there might be arguments over things not getting done to expectations]

Your business would not likely last. In the workplace at least some meetings seem essential to smooth and sound operations. What about family life? For many, the idea of holding a family meeting seems strangely formal, controlling, or un-family like. After all, at home you’re supposed to be able take your shoes off, flip on the television and relax. But like a well run business meeting, family meetings can be useful to smooth and sound family operations.

Steven R. Covey believes many families are managed on the basis of crisis, moods, quick fixes, and instant gratification – not sound principles. Instead of planning and proactively shaping their future, many families simply react to family situations that arise by default. Think for a moment about some of small irritations or crises that you have had in your own families. Was your response proactive or reactive? Does anyone have any examples that aren’t too personal that you’d be willing to share?

[Be prepared with an example from your own life. Explain how things might have been different if you had only planned ahead or communicated clearly before the situation. Invite others to share examples, but don’t dwell too much on the negative.]

If you wish more from your family than what surfaces by default, you may want to consider the advantages of holding regular family meetings. Here are a few:

- 1. Family meetings can help clarify expectations. Many of the arguments or**

problems in families result from unclear expectation about who, what, when, and where. Statements such as “I thought you were picking up the kids,” or “But there is a soccer game tonight,” indicate a lack of planning or effective communication.

Family meetings can be an opportunity to not only discuss the weekly calendar of events, but also a chance to clarify and discuss expectations about drugs, sexual activity, appropriate movies, honesty, education, and so forth. When the expectations for behavior are clear, misbehavior, intentional or not, is much less common.

[You may want to point out that talking with your children about drugs is one of the greatest predictors of drug use. Hence, the public service announcements which refer to parents as the “anti-drug.”]

2. Family meetings can build greater commitment to goals, projects or family endeavors. When ideas are discussed together and everyone is given a chance for input—commitment increases. Instead of it being mom or dad’s demand, it becomes the personal commitment of each family member. Ownership is shared and it becomes our goal for our family.

3. Family meetings can encourage healthy communication. When family concerns or problems arise in your families, when are they typically discussed and how do you feel at the time?

[Encourage discussion. Try to help the group bring out the idea that we often end up talking about problems at times when we are emotionally charged.]

Without a regular means to communicate concerns, families often discuss issues when they arise and are on our minds. Typically this is in the heat of the moment when we’re upset, frustrated, threatened, or have had all we can take.

Emotionally charged discussions are rarely productive. There is too much talking and too little listening. When concerns can be put on the agenda for the next family meeting, it allows tempers to cool and communication to be managed more effectively. Some families have found that using a “talking stick” is useful to assure everyone gets a chance to talk without interruption. A talking stick is just a stick or other prop that can be decorated or not. Whoever has the stick gets to talk. If you don’t have the stick, you can’t talk and should listen.

[Have a talking stick to show the group. Really, any prop will work. Pass around a hat, a ball, a gavel, or a frying pan...but make sure it remains a “talking stick”, not a “whopping stick”]

It can also be helpful to establish the guidelines for the discussion so it doesn’t turn sour. What are some guidelines you might lay down as ground rules?

[Encourage discussion. Ideas might include such things as:

- Only one person talks at a time.
- Use the pronoun “I”, which accepts responsibility instead of “you”, which often is accusatory.
- You can only have the floor for 60 seconds at a time (bring a stopwatch).
- Only share a complaint if you also share a solution.
- Share 5 positives to every 1 negative.
- Never ridicule or suggest an idea is stupid.]

Family meetings can be a great place to model effective problem-solving and cooperative strategies and teach children to communicate effectively and respectfully.

4. Family meetings can be an opportunity to appreciate and celebrate.

Kindness is a critical part of strong families. Incorporating an opportunity to share our appreciation for deeds well done and celebrate the achievement of family members can help keep family meetings positive and fun. Opening family meetings with a devotional can set the stage for keeping things upbeat and encouraging. Some families also incorporate a “Thank You” section on the agenda.

[Since this is the first time you have mentioned the idea of an agenda, you might want to pass it out now. An agenda for a family meeting is difficult for many to understand. Defer any extended discussion about the agenda to later.]

5. Family meetings can strengthen commitment to family time.

Unfortunately, for many, unplanned free time at home can easily drift into kicking back, watching television, or working on personal projects. There are many things we’d like to do with our families...some day – but when? Family time involves others and is most likely to happen when it’s planned. Certainly not everything must be planned, but planning helps force a commitment. And too often family time suffers because of a lack of commitment. But think what would happen if during a family meeting, a commitment and time is arranged to fly kites so that it is likely to happen—regardless of how tired we might be when we get home from work. If we wait for a convenient time to do spontaneous things together as a family, our time together will likely be limited. So now you know why family meetings are important, but what makes them effective. What do you think is the key to an effective family meeting?

[Encourage discussion.]

Getting the most from family meetings requires that meetings be well managed and kept positive. This is most likely when we remember that:

1. **Family meetings are not a gripe session.** For every complaint, there

should be a proposed solution.

2. **Family meetings are not parent-controlled.** All family members are given an opportunity to participate fully. But no one is forced. Parents may provide leadership and guidance, but the most effective family meetings are conducted by a rotating chair under principles of democracy. This gives all family members an opportunity to practice leadership skills and grow in responsibility. What would be lost if parents were always in charge and ran the meeting?

[Encourage discussion. Participants may suggest the following:

- Children would feel that family meetings were a preaching session.
- Children wouldn't be excited about sharing their ideas and they wouldn't care to know about their parents' ideas.
- Children wouldn't be able to practice monitoring a discussion so it was fair to all.]

3. **Family meetings are regular.** Holding family meetings only when problems exist is reactive rather than proactive. It prevents activities and schedules from being discussed in a timely manner. It usually results in viewing family meetings as negative experiences. Ideally, family meetings are held weekly. At a minimum, they should be held monthly.
4. **Family meetings are semi-structured or somewhat formal.** When an agenda is used and records are kept, the effectiveness of the meeting increases. If assignments or plans are recorded in the minutes, follow-through is more likely. Responsibilities are clear. And the good intentions of the meeting are less likely to be lost in the hustle and bustle of family life. Reading the minutes or notes from the previous meeting can be particularly helpful in creating continuity between meetings and ensuring follow-through. When written and reviewed, expectations for all family members become clear. Although such formality may feel unnatural in the family domain, this more than almost anything else can improve the effectiveness of family meetings.

[Agenda and minutes for a family meeting seems excessive to many people. However, it can greatly influence the effectiveness of the meeting. You may wish to discuss the analogy of a business meeting again. Ask participants what else they might include on an agenda template.]

5. **Family meetings are fun.** Make sure doom and gloom do not dominate the agenda. Plan a family outing or vacation. Discuss exciting purchases you may be planning. Acknowledge the things your family is doing well.

6. And always end on a high note, like ice-cream and hot apple pie! Your family will soon love family meetings.

Now let's try our hand at a family meeting. Please get into family size groups of 3-5 individuals

[Pass out the group activity instructions. Give the group an opportunity to conduct a short meeting. Appropriately debrief the activity by discussion their observations. Pass out the evaluation and make any closing remarks. Move on to group activity.]

Original work by Steven A. Dennis

Family Meetings

TIME: 15 minutes

PURPOSE: Explore the possibilities of family meetings.

ROLES: Mom, Dad, Daughter, Son, etc.

DIRECTIONS: Welcome to the Jones family! Tonight we are having a family meeting. Each member of the group should take a family role. Decide who will chair the meeting. The main topics for the meeting will be scheduling upcoming “family night” activities and talking about television rules. Invent the rest of the details. Sorry, but someone forgot to make the treats, so we will have double servings next week!

Family Meeting Agenda Date: _____

Chairperson: _____ Recorder: _____

1. ' Minutes from Last Meeting & Follow-up

2. ' Appreciation

Thank you for...	Love...
L _____	AE _____
L _____	AE _____
L _____	AE _____
L _____	AE _____
L _____	AE _____

3. Weekly Check of Family Goals

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| ' Read books together | ' Turn off lights | ' Finish chores |
| ' Watch less television | ' Finish homework before 8:00 pm | |
| ' Take dog for a walk regularly | ' Hold weekly family night | |
| ' Don't waste food | _____ | |

4. Discussion Items

Issue	Brought to you by...	
" _____	_____	
" _____	_____	
" _____	_____	
" _____	_____	
" _____	_____	

Family Mission

T Spiritual
T Physical
T Cognitive
T Social
T Financial

5. Assignments

Task		Responsible Person
" _____	+	_____
" _____	+	_____
" _____	+	_____
" _____	+	_____
" _____	+	_____

6. ' Calendaring (Schedule your own Family Meetings and Family Nights)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Family Meetings That Everyone Loves

Grab N' Go Reminders:

- 1) Family meetings can help clarify expectations.
- 2) Family meetings can build greater commitment to goals, projects or family endeavors.
- 3) Family meetings can encourage healthy communication.
- 4) Family meetings can be an opportunity to appreciate and celebrate.
- 5) Family meetings can strengthen commitment to family time.

How to Keep Family Meetings Positive and Productive

Keep in mind:

- 1) Family meetings are not a gripe session.
- 2) Family meetings are not parent-controlled.
- 3) Family meetings are regular.
- 4) Family meetings are semi-structured or somewhat formal.
- 5) Family meetings are fun.

Notes from session

Family Meetings that Everyone Loves

Please answer the following question in order to help us know whether this session was helpful to you.

1. This workshop gave me specific ideas that will be helpful to me.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree.
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

2. I think this session will help me be a better family member.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree.
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

3. I am glad I attended this workshop.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree.
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

Comments or suggestions: