



Family Meetings

Businesses have them...Girl Scouts have them...PTA's have them – scheduled times to synchronize, organize and discuss. They are otherwise known as MEETINGS, and families can have them, too! Family meetings can be very supportive in this busy world. They can be times to teach our children how to handle conflict and resolve problems. They can be times we consciously tune in to what other family members are doing. They allow us to synchronize our schedules and make sure we are aware of those important games, due dates for projects, and parties. The larger your family, the more beneficial family meetings can be. Here are guidelines for making family meetings work for you:

Schedule meetings regularly. Pick the optimum schedule for **your** family and stick with it. The goals are to keep meetings fun and timely. You might want to begin with meeting twice a month. Also, children will take on the respect displayed by the adults. If parents cancel meetings because they have over-scheduled themselves or because they would rather do something else, children will not view family meetings as important.

Keep the meeting time sacred. Agree that no one will answer the telephone during the meeting. Turn off the television, and don't schedule the meeting during dinner or another activity.

Keep an agenda throughout the week. A whiteboard, chalkboard, or piece of paper on the refrigerator will work. When a problem arises, add it to the agenda. Events, projects, trips, conflicts between family members, vacation ideas, and suggestions are all topics for the agenda.

Make decisions by consensus. Everyone must agree. This is a great lesson in "enrolling" others and win-win negotiation. If an agreement is not reached, table the discussion and put it on the agenda for the next family meeting.

Have a leader and secretary for each meeting. Rotate these responsibilities. This is a wonderful opportunity for children to lead. The leader keeps the meeting orderly and guides the family through the agenda. Parents can assist younger children. The secretary records the topics discussed and the decisions reached. Place the minutes in a binder after each meeting. In addition to the secretary feeling very valuable for his contribution to the family, there are multiple benefits. (1) If there are disagreements about decisions ("Dad DID say we would go for ice cream on Friday!"), families can refer to the minutes for clarity. (2) The minutes will create a record of your family. You can re-visit the minutes years later and remember the details of your family's growth.

Start each meeting with something that creates unity. One idea is to share something encouraging about each family member. For instance, "I loved that you helped me with my homework last night!" This is particularly helpful when there is conflict. It is hard to be angry at someone who is sincerely saying something wonderful about you!

End each meeting with something fun. Let the leader choose dessert or a family activity. He can choose what video the family will watch or a game to play together.

Family meetings can build unity. They can help cement families in a busy world that pulls us in different directions, helping us reconnect. Schedule a meeting for your family this week!

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