

## Family Meetings

One of the best ways to prepare your children for success in a democratic society is to teach them the “give and take” that comes with cooperative problem solving or decision-making. One excellent way to do this is through “Family Meetings.”

It would be nice if there was a simple formula for keeping a family together but there is not. However, what might come closest is the following, although overused, slogan: “*when a family talks, nobody walks.*”

You can begin holding family meetings as soon as your children are old enough to participate, which is usually by about the age of seven. Family meetings can be used to plan a fun family activity, as an opportunity to have problem –prevention discussions, used as character talks as well as family council meetings which are an ideal time for all the family to participate in resolving problems and making family decisions.

Regular family meetings will teach each person in the family that when we all are on the same boat, everyone on board can share in steering the boat, and the best way to decide how and where to steer teaches everyone about cooperation. Regular participation in family meetings teaches each person in the family to make the best choices they can make; after all everyone will have to live with the consequences once the choices are made.

Family meetings are laboratories for individual courage. Each family member learns how important it is to say what he or she really think and feel, even if these views are not shared by anybody else. Meetings also provide opportunities for encouragement. When children see their ideas valued and their participation welcomed, they think well of themselves. This self-esteem can carry over into other aspects of their lives.

There are a few simple guidelines to make the family meetings successful. Keep the meeting informal and brief, so nobody resents the forum. To keep the meeting running smoothly, set up some basic ground rules such as “we will treat each other respectfully.” It is important that everyone agree with this. Other basic rules are “We will listen while someone else is speaking”, “we will wait until the person who is talking is finished before we speak,” “ we will not insult or put down anybody’s idea”. By setting the guidelines at the beginning, it is easy to refer to them when someone is uncooperative.. Be careful, however, not to turn the meeting into one of the confrontation.

Parents are usually the ones to present the idea and get the meetings started. Select a time and place convenient and agreeable to everyone. A good time to consider is Sunday afternoons-as the beginning of the week it is a great time to discuss what coming up and to review what has happened in the past week.

Your goal is to establish family meetings as enjoyable times that allow children to have their voices heard and their wishes considered. Stay upbeat and encouraging as much as possible and you will find that family meetings are a great benefit to parents and children alike.

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