

parenting*ideas

FAMILY MEETINGS

HOW TO USE FAMILY MEETINGS TO
IMPROVE COMMUNICATION, COOPERATION
AND CONSISTENCY AND TO DEVELOP CONFLICT
RESOLUTION SKILLS IN YOUR KIDS



parentingideas.com.au

VALUES

FAMILY MEETINGS ARE BASED AROUND FIVE VALUES

1 SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

As a family you share decisions, responsibilities, joys and problems. The family meeting is the vehicle to put shared responsibility into action.

2 EQUALITY

Parents and children have equal rights to be heard and to influence others.

3 MUTUAL RESPECT

Family meetings run on the notion of respectful behaviour. We treat each other fairly and respectfully. This is shown when we listen to each other, don't use put downs and take an interest in each other.

4 SELF-DISCIPLINE

Using family meetings parents teach kids respect for order, control their impulses, regulate their behaviour within limits and develop an appreciation for the rights of others.

5 COOPERATION

Using family meeting children learn that their behaviour impacts on others. Cooperation is a group-oriented notion. Parents use the meetings to foster a spirit of cooperation rather than coercion.



PURPOSE OF FAMILY MEETINGS

THERE ARE AT LEAST 5 REASONS TO HOLD A FAMILY MEETING

- 1 Provide a structured chance to **Catch up and celebrate** successes
- 2 Involve kids in family **decision-making**
- 3 Allocate **chores**
- 4 Resolve **personal conflicts**
- 5 Plan for **fun**.

BENEFITS

HERE ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF HOLDING REGULAR FAMILY MEETINGS

- 1 Improve family **communication & closeness** between kids
- 2 Get both parents on the same wavelength which leads to greater **consistency**
- 3 Children **have a say** in how their family operates and also have greater power over their own lives
- 4 Kids are more likely to **cooperate** with parents as they have had a say in the decisions that affect them and their family
- 5 Kids develop the skills of **resolving conflict** which will impact on other relationships
- 6 Parents **share** the load so they experience less stress.

"As they are growing up, it has been so rewarding to see them take over the reins of these meetings. So yes they are successful."
Serena Paramanathan

ESSENTIALS OF A FAMILY MEETING

THERE ARE AT LEAST 5 REASONS TO HOLD A FAMILY MEETING

- 1 They must be **regular** – once a week
- 2 Start when the eldest is **five**
- 3 Follow a **balanced agenda**. It will fail miserably if it is a continual whinge session
- 4 Have a **chairperson**. This should be a parent initially but the chairperson's job can be shared around as kids get more competent
- 5 Establish simple **rules**
- 6 Parents must take them **seriously**
- 7 **Start** with an encouragement
- 8 **Finish** with a fun activity. The start and finish are critical to the overall success of the meeting process.
- 9 A meeting should be held in a comfortable **dedicated space**
- 10 Stick to **decisions** made during the week and change at meetings.

TIMING

Avoid having them drag on and on. 15 minutes is an average length of time. Some will go longer and some will be shorter. Have a timekeeper who lets you know how long the meeting has gone for.



AS A GENERAL RULE

Keep the meetings brief and positive. Avoid letting them become a whinge session by staying solution focused.

1 START WITH ENCOURAGEMENT

Start each meeting with an activity where members share positive experiences and learn to express themselves in a safe environment. This needs to be parent lead at first. The chairperson invites each person to:

1 SAY SOMETHING GOOD

Teach your kids to be more optimistic by looking for something good that happened during the week. This teaches kids to positively frame or look for the good in themselves, others or situation.

e.g. "Can you think about something good that happened to you during the week?"
"What's something new you learned at school?"

2 SHOW APPRECIATION

Teach your kids to show appreciation to someone for something they did during the week.

e.g. "Thanks mum for helping at ... this week."
"I liked it when you let me play with your toys"

3 GIVE A COMPLIMENT

Teach your kids to give and receive compliments. Invite participants to give a personal compliment to someone present about something they did well during the previous week. The person who receives the compliment needs to respond appropriately too – without embarrassment or deflecting it.

e.g. "That was the best game of basketball I have seen you play." "Thanks, I was pretty wrapt myself."
"You packed away your toys everyday without being asked." "No problem."

4 OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT

If they've done something brave (e.g. given a talk at school despite being nervous) then throw a little spotlight on how they did it. Helping a child achieve this type of self-knowledge is one of the keys to effective parenting.



Go around the group catching up on what you have done in the last week. Parents should begin at first. Here are some ideas:

▶ **ONE GOOD, ONE CHALLENGE**

"Tell us one good thing and one challenge that you faced this week."

▶ **ONE POSITIVE, ONE NEGATIVE**

"Can you think of something positive and something not so great that happened this week?"

▶ **SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING DIFFERENT**

"Share something new and something a little unusual that has happened recently?"

▶ **SOMETHING AT SCHOOL, SOMETHING AT HOME**

"What's happening at school and at home?"

▶ **WHAT'S HAPPENING?**

Invite kids to briefly talk about their week, anything unusual, worrying or fun happening?



3 PLANNING /DISCUSSION FAMILY ACTIVITY

The initial decision-making process should involve planning for a fun activity. Perhaps plan a bike ride, a movie, a day out or evening meal. Ask the kids for suggestions but be prepared to steer it in a direction that you feel comfortable with. It is a good idea in the early stages or when children are young to offer a choice of two or three activities.

4 ALLOCATION OF CHORES AND HELP

Discuss the allocation of chores for the following week. Present a weekly roster and begin to complete it. It can be finished after a meeting if it is taking too long. Have two or three chores for each child. This doesn't mean that kids only do jobs that are rostered, but it is a good idea for kids to have a number of significant chores each week.

"Kids appreciate input and tend to call Meetings as well."

Yvonne Packbier



5 DISCUSSION OF FAMILY ISSUES

Each family meeting should offer the opportunity for children to discuss a family issue. It can either be a problematic issue for one or two kids or something involving the whole family. These range from the daily and mundane such as bedroom tidiness to what to do with toys that are not wanted any more; or bigger ideas such as how to help others at Christmas.

HERE IS A SIMPLE FOUR STEP FORMAT FOR DISCUSSING FAMILY ISSUES

1 DEFINE THE ISSUES OR PROBLEM

"Jeremy is always late getting ready for school."

2 GENERATE SOLUTIONS

"Get up earlier." "Put TV on when ready." "Pack bag the night before."

3 EVALUATE THE IDEA

"I think getting up earlier in the morning means going to bed earlier the night before. That's not great. What about ..."

4 GET SOME AGREEMENT OR CONSENSUS

"I'll get my school stuff ready the night before."



AS A GENERAL RULE

Refer ongoing problems and issues to a family meeting rather than dealing with them at the time (e.g. Messy bedrooms, argumentative kids and forgotten chores).



6 RESOLVING PERSONAL CONFLICT

There are times when children may need an opportunity to resolve personal conflict. This can be initiated by a parent or by children themselves.

FOLLOW THIS FORMAT FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

1 CONTROL YOUR EMOTIONS

When children are upset and out of control say something like: "You need to calm down. You can speak when you have settled down."

2 COMMUNICATE YOUR SIDE OF THE STORY - YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ABOUT IT

Ask for children's side of the story without naming, blaming or shaming. "Stick to the story without calling your brother names please."

3 SEE THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Help children to see issues from the perspective of their siblings or parents. "What do you think your brother was trying to say to you?"

4 SAY WHAT YOU WANT BUT BE WILLING TO NEGOTIATE A SOLUTION

Help children search for a solution that will suit everyone: "How can we make this happen so that everyone is happy?"

5 AGREE TO A SOLUTION

Getting kids to agree to a solution can be time-consuming but it is worth it as kids will more likely stick to a solution they have had a say in making. "Do you both agree to stick to this for, let's say, a week?"



AS A GENERAL RULE

Frame problems as 'we' not 'I'. For example, "We have a problem with mess in the bathroom. What can we do about it?"



7 FINISH WITH A FUN ACTIVITY

It is essential that you finish the family meeting on a bright note with an enjoyable activity.

SOME SUGGESTIONS: a game, a story, ice cream, pocket money, a DVD or a quiz.

The chairperson can decide the activity or it can be shared around. Don't abandon this aspect if the kids have been poorly behaved as it is sure to cause resentment and suspicion that this is an adult ploy to get kids to obey them.



RULES


It is essential to establish a simple set of rules so that the meetings run smoothly. Two or three should be enough. Here are some ideas:

- ▶ "Everyone contributes but you are allowed to pass."
- ▶ "Listen to others"
- ▶ "Be supportive not critical - No put downs"
- ▶ "Don't use what is said during the meeting against someone later"

Consider what you will do for disruptive behaviour. Consider having a 'sin bin'.

AGENDA

Family meetings will run smoothly if there is a set agenda. Keep an agenda list in a prominent part of the house. Parents and children should write any issue down on this list during the week. Any issues not discussed during a meeting can be discussed at the next one.



"If I call a snap family meeting they don't like it! All my family likes to have an agenda to review so they can prepare - I guess it's about them having input rather than me always being in control!" Donna Ambler

CHAIRPERSON

The chairperson's job is to direct the meeting. In the early stages parents need to take this role but it should be shared around when the kids get the hang of the job. It is a great learning experience for kids.

THINK OF SOME GUIDELINES FOR THE CHAIRPERSON

1

2

3

KEEPING RECORDS

It is a good idea to keep records of the meetings. This serves a number of purposes. You can refer back to previous decisions made, which is useful when there are disputes. Records give you an opportunity to reflect on your practice and work toward improving your meetings. Record keeping adds gravitas to the process.

A simple way to keep records is to complete and retain the Meeting agendas. You will find some samples further on in this program.

As part of your record-keeping consider completing a diary and journal as a way of reviewing the success of your family meetings.

NB: AT THE END OF THIS GUIDE YOU WILL FIND SOME DIARY AND JOURNAL TEMPLATES TO GET YOU STARTED.



AS A GENERAL RULE

During the week refer back to a decision that was made at a meeting when appropriate. "We agreed at the meeting that we should"

"We talk about what was done last month (we have a minutes book which has been a hoot to look back at!), what we are all up to this month, the boys get to air any grievances. We set family goals and challenges, take turns to chair and to take notes." Serena Paramanathan



GETTING STARTED

Consider introducing the concept of Family Meetings in stages. How fast you move through to the third stage will depend on your children's age, skill levels and family comfort levels.

Begin at stage 1 with your first few meetings regardless of your children's ages. It takes a while to get the process started.

STAGE 1: STARTING OUT / LEARNING TO SHARE & PARTICIPATE

- ▶ "Everyone contributes but you are allowed to pass."
- ▶ "Listen to others"
- ▶ "Be supportive not critical - No put downs"
- ▶ "Don't use what is said during the meeting against someone later"

STAGE 2: LEARNING TO PROBLEM-SOLVE

- ▶ Allocation of chores Discussion of family issues Finish with a fun activity
- ▶ Discussion of family issues Finish with a fun activity
- ▶ Finish with a fun activity

STAGE 3: LEARNING TO PROBLEM-SOLVE

- ▶ Resolution of personal conflict (initiated by parents or kids)

"We have them once a week. We follow a plan and each family member has a role. We record the minutes in a special note book for reference. Our kids feel they have a voice." Tanya de Hoog



AGENDA

MEETING NO:

CHAIRPERSON:

DATE:

TIME:

ACTIVITIES

ENCOURAGEMENT ACTIVITY:

CATCH-UP ACTIVITY:

THINGS TO TALK ABOUT

1

WHO

2

WHO

3

WHO

4

WHO

FINISHING ACTIVITY

THINGS TO TALK ABOUT

1

2

3

4

NEXT MEETING:

CHAIRPERSON:

RECORD

MEETING NO:

CHAIRPERSON:

DATE:

TIME:

WHAT WENT WELL?

WHAT NEEDS WORKING ON?

WHAT TO DO NEXT TIME?

OTHER COMMENTS OR THOUGHTS?

SAMPLE ROSTER

| | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|----------------------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| EMPTY THE DISHWASHER | CAYDN | SARAH | JORDAN | CAYDN | SARAH | JORDAN | CAYDN |
| FEED THE DOG | SARAH | CAYDN | SARAH | JORDAN | CAYDN | SARAH | JORDAN |
| MEAL DUTIES | JORDEN | SARAH | CAYDN | SARAH | JORDAN | CAYDN | SARAH |

ROSTER

| | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|--|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |