

9 Steps for Effective Family Meetings

- 1. Introduction:** "We are going to have our first family meeting. We will read these steps and practice each one until we all know them well enough to have family meetings without reading them."
- 2. Talking stick:** "This item will be passed around to help everyone remember that only one person can talk at a time, and that everyone gets a turn. Who would like to start with No. 3?" (If children are old enough they can take turns reading the steps.)
- 3. Compliments or appreciations:** "Each of us will share one thing we appreciate about each member of the family. I will start. I would like to compliment _____ for _____." (Give each family member a compliment, and then have them all do the same.)
- 4. Family meeting agenda:** "The agenda will be placed on the refrigerator so every one can write down problems during the week. You'll notice that **everyone not being dressed and ready to go when it is time to leave in the morning** is on the agenda for us to practice problem-solving."
- 5. Teach about Focusing on Solutions and Brainstorming:** "Brainstorming means thinking of as many solutions as we can. All ideas are okay (even funny ideas). We will write down every idea without discussion. Let's practice with this problem. Who would like to be our scribe and write down every suggestion?" (If your children aren't old enough, you can take this job.)
- 6. Encourage the children to go first:** "Who would like to start with some wild and crazy ideas?" (If no one speaks up, you might need to get them started with some wild and some practical ideas by saying, "What about leaving in our pajamas, or those who aren't ready can walk?" Allow for silence. If someone objects to any ideas, say, "For now we are just brainstorming for solutions. All ideas will be written down." (Be sure you have at least 4 suggestions. 6 are even better.)
- 7. Use the 3 R's and an H to assess proposed solutions:** Encouraging solutions must be (1) Related, (2) Reasonable, (3) Respectful, and, (4) Helpful. "Who can see any solutions we need to eliminate because they are not related, reasonable, respectful, or helpful? Our scribe can cross them off after we discuss why."
- 8. Choosing the solution:** "Do we want to narrow it to one solution that we can all agree to, or try more than one? We can evaluate how the solution or solutions worked during our next meeting in one week."
- 9. Fun activity:** "We will take turns choosing an activity for the end of each family meeting. For tonight I've chosen Charades. Who will volunteer to decide the fun activity for next week?"

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL FAMILY MEETINGS

1. Remember the long-term purpose of family meetings: To teach valuable life skills.
2. Have all family members sit around a table (not during a meal time) or in another comfortable space where they can all see each other.
3. Post an agenda where family members can write their concerns or problems.
4. Start with compliments to set the tone by verbalizing positive things about each other.
5. Focus on solutions, not blame.
6. Teach children about brainstorming: Brainstorming means we think of all the possible solutions we could use to solve this challenge. It is okay to have fun and suggest wild and crazy ideas. During the brainstorming time all ideas are okay. We will write down every suggestion without discussion. When we are finished brainstorming we will choose one we can all agree with because it is practical and respectful to everyone.
7. Have fun. Some suggestions can be silly or outrageous.
8. Choose one suggestion (by consensus) that is practical and respectful to everyone and try it for a week. (Or, if several suggestions might work, let each person choose which one he or she would like to use.)
9. When consensus can't be reached (and it is practical to use only one suggestion), table that item for more discussion next week.
10. Calendar a family fun activity for later in the week—and all sports and other activities (including a schedule who need rides where and when).
11. Keep family meetings short, 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the ages of your children.
12. End with a family fun activity, game, or dessert.
13. MISTAKES ARE WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN.

CAUTIONS

14. AVOID using family meetings as a platform for lectures and parental control.
15. DON'T expect perfection. Celebrate improvement.
16. LEARNING SKILLS TAKES TIME. You wouldn't expect children to learn to read in a day, a week, or a month. Family members need time to learn cooperation and problem solving skills. Even solutions that don't work provide an opportunity to learn and try again to focus on respectful solutions.
17. UNDERSTAND DEVELOPMENTAL READINESS. Children under the age of four may not be developmentally ready to participate in family meetings, but may be content to do a quiet activity such as drawing. If younger children are too distracting, wait until they are asleep.
18. AVOID SKIPPING REGULAR, WEEKLY FAMILY MEETINGS. **Make them the most important date on your calendar.**