

FAMILY MEETINGS

Family meetings can be a very good way to talk about and work out difference of opinions. Teens especially want to feel they have some input into their daily life, and the Family Meeting can help accomplish this. Family Meeting, Family Council, encourages family cooperation and closeness while serving as an effective way to solve problems.

There are some guidelines to follow:

1. Schedule a meeting once a week at a regular time when everyone can attend. (even younger children who may not be as involved as teens will be.)
2. Keep the time sacred. Allow as few interruptions as possible. Return phone calls that come in after the meeting is over, or let the answering machine get the call. Do not have the meeting during mealtime. Sit at a table; pick a chair for the leader to sit in and reserve it for the leader.
3. First meeting: make a list of "Rules for Family Meeting;" fewer is better, but create what is needed; then right them on a poster to be visible during the meetings.
4. The leader runs the meeting. The leader enforces the rules seeing that everyone has a chance to express their opinion. The leader is to maintain order and calmness. The leader rotates among family members each meeting. Children need to serve as leader once they are of age enough to perform the role. (this will vary depending on the nature of the child)
5. It is helpful to have a secretary to take notes; it is especially important to note decisions that are made. Important also is a list of ideas discussed. Close the meeting by reading the Minutes to check on accuracy and to remind everyone of the outcomes.
6. Members should speak using "I" sentences versus "you." "I get upset when people ignore me." "It is really important to me..." "I feel sad when..." Members are to identify what they need, how they feel, not tell other people how to feel or what to do.
7. Keep an "Agenda List" handy so family members can add issues of concern to the meeting agenda, as they come up.
8. The purpose of the meeting is to name problems and then work on solutions. It is not to whine and complain or to yell at each other. Identify the problem and work on a solution. You are either part of the solution or part of the problem.
9. All members get to vote; this is a democracy so majority rules. Members must not abuse their right to vote, such as making unreasonable demands (e.g., Mom and Dad will buy me a car.)
10. Parents need to give up their parent role and be just "one of the group." But, parents are still parents and are responsible for their children's safety and well being. Parents are ultimately in charge and ultimately responsible. But work hard at making this a democratic process.