

10 Steps for Effective Family Meetings

Objective:

- To provide coaching for a volunteer who is willing to practice solving a “real challenge” through the family meeting process as a demonstration for the whole group.
- To help parents understand that there is no such thing as a perfect family meeting, and that practice makes better.

Materials:

- Flip chart and markers
- Talking stick-or something to represent a talking stick
- Notebook or paper for Agenda
- Challenges and Characteristics and Life Skills lists from the Two Lists Activity.
- 10 Steps for Effective Family Meetings (handout)
- Tips for Successful Family Meetings (handout)

Comment:

During family meetings children have the opportunity to develop most of the Characteristics and Life Skills parents hope for them, including a sense of belonging and the belief that they are capable. Parents have the opportunity to avoid power struggles when they invite shared problem-solving instead of lecturing and micromanaging.

Directions:

1. Pass out a copy of the *10 Steps for Effective Family Meetings* to each participant, so they can follow along.
2. Ask for four volunteers to be a family of four to demonstrate using the 10 Steps for Effective Family Meetings. They can decide who will be two parents, and two children (and the ages of the children). Point out that family meetings work best with children over the age of four.
3. Ask one of the parents to read aloud the *10 Steps as they practice each one*. (If the children are old enough, an option would be to take turns reading the steps.)
4. Hand the “talking stick” and the “agenda” to the volunteer parent and ask him or her to go through all of the *10 Steps*.

5. When they are finished, process with the kids what they were thinking, feeling, and deciding during the family meeting. Point to the Characteristics and Life Skills list and ask them if they can find things that they were learning. (Usually most of them)
6. Ask the parents what they were thinking, feeling and deciding.

EXTENSION:

7. Form groups of four to five. Each group can decide the “characters” in their family, and can then choose a challenge from the Challenges List (or any challenge they would like to address). Allow 10 minutes for them to role-play having a family meeting following the *10 Steps for Effective Family Meetings*
8. When time is up, ask if anyone would like to share what went on in their family meeting—successes/challenges.
9. Ask all participants to share what they learned from this activity. (See Facilitators Note below for answers to some typical questions.)
10. Pass out the *Tips for Successful Family Meetings* as homework.

Facilitators Note: Instead of answering questions immediately, first ask the rest of the group what they think. If they don’t come up with a point that needs to be made, you can then make it—or assign someone to research a chapter in one of the Positive Discipline books for an answer. Some of the most common questions:

Q: What if my spouse can’t attend?

A: Call it a problem-solving session instead of a family meeting.

Q: What if a child refuses to give a compliment?

A: Say, “Okay. Maybe you’ll want to next time,” and continue on around the circle.

10 Steps for Effective Family Meetings

1. **Introduction:** “We will read these steps until we all know them. Who would like to start with No. 2?” (If children are old enough they can take turns reading the steps.)
2. **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.)
3. **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 **leaving dishes in the sink** is on the agenda for us to practice problem-solving.”
4. **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.”
5. **Brainstorming:** “Brainstorming means thinking of as many solutions as we can. While brainstorming all ideas are okay (even funny ideas) without discussion.”
6. **Focus on solutions:** “Let’s practice with the problem on the agenda. Who would like to be our scribe and write down every suggestion?” (If your children aren’t old enough, you can take this job.)
7. **Encourage the kids 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 throwing dirty dishes in the garbage, or each taking a day of the week to put the dishes in the dishwasher?”, but first allow for silence. If someone objects to any ideas, say, “For now we are just brainstorming for solutions. All ideas will be written down.”)
8. **Use the 3 Rs 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.”
9. **Choosing the solution:** “Do we want to narrow it to one solution or try more than one? We can evaluate how the solution or solutions worked during our next meeting in one week.”
10. **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

1. **AVOID** using family meetings as a platform for lectures and parental control.
2. **DON'T** expect perfection. Celebrate improvement.
3. **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 skills. Even solutions that don't work provide an opportunity to learn and try again to focus on respectful solutions.
4. **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.
5. **AVOID SKIPPING REGULAR, WEEKLY FAMILY MEETINGS. Make them the most important date on your calendar.**