

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Why Have Family Meetings?



BY KIM DEMARCHI

There always seems to be the need for a family discussion, a brainstorm, a lesson to be learned, a schedule to be talked about, and a meal plan to be made. When, where, and how are the most effective

ways of making these items happen? Family meetings, of course! I'm a huge fan of them!

Not only will you solve the above mentioned items in a family meeting, but holding regular family meetings is one of the most valuable things you can do as a family. They are the place where children can practice asserting their feelings, conflict resolution, and leadership skills. Family meetings provide an extraordinary opportunity to teach children valuable social and life skills. They'll learn listening skills, brainstorming skills, problem solving skills, mutual respect, cooperation, accountability, a sense of belonging, and that mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn.

I know family meetings sound daunting at first. But the family connection you gain will make it all worth the effort. To set it up for success, make sure the meetings are short and fun. You can start as early as when your children are in preschool. At the beginning, 15 minutes is plenty. Everyone attends the meetings, everyone has a voice, and mutual respect is shown at all times.

1. Explain. Explain to your children that you are now going to have a new fun way where everyone in the family can come together and help solve any issue that comes up in the family.

2. Schedule. Hold the meeting once a week, on the same day, at the same time. Put it on everyone's calendars and keep it sacred. Perhaps sit in a room in the house with the fewest distractions. Have some ground rules about interruptions. For example, no TV, phone calls, iPads, etc...

3. Rotate Leadership.

This is a great place children will also learn to be leaders and followers. Each week, a new leader is chosen to run the meeting. They make sure the family sticks to the agenda and makes sure family members only speak when it is their turn. With young children, it may be helpful to have a "talking stick" that gives only that person with the stick an opportunity to speak.

4. Create Rituals. Start or end family meetings on a fun or light note. Hold hands, sing a song, play a game, read a book, tell jokes, or have a special dessert.

5. Create a Weekly Agenda. Keep it on the refrigerator so everyone has a chance to add items to it. The leader will use the agenda to stay on track. Meetings can be started with appreciations which positively connect everyone. Each family member goes around and states who or what they appreciate. Then, comment on last week's solutions and how they are working for everyone. Next, come improvements. If anyone has something they wish to be improved upon, now is the time to bring it up so it can be talked about. Examples: switching around the chores, Dad working a lot, siblings arguing, planning the family trip, raising allowances, dragging out the bedtime routine, missing the school bus, etc... Make sure each person feels heard and helps contribute in solving the issue. Then, this is a great time to talk about the family calendar for the upcoming week and meal planning for the week. Don't forget to end the meeting with something fun! We usually play a game or have a special dessert.



Family meetings can be a source of fun, closeness, encouragement, support and a sense of teamwork working together toward common goals. Remember the other long range purpose as well... to teach valuable life skills. Mutual respect is important. Model all the skills during family meetings that you want your children to learn. Family meetings take time and effort to get into the groove, but it might just be one of your most valuable parenting tools!

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