

Meeting as a Family

Learn How Your Family Can Work as a Team

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Your family as a group

The work of groups is often done at meetings. We have all been to meetings that were a waste of time. But you may have been at productive meetings, too. Remember how rewarding it feels when a meeting is successful?

Just like any group, families can use meetings to get their “work” done. Having a good meeting will also help bring the family closer together. This brochure give some tips on how your family can have successful meetings.

Families are different from other types of groups. Families are closer than most groups because they share a common ancestry, and they often live together. Some families tend to focus on agreeing and dislike conflict, while others get divided by conflict and lack of agreement.

Conflict and disagreement are not always bad. If they are resolved by problem-solving, your family will be more creative. In problem-solving, all sides are explored and all options are examined. Family members will understand each other more when they solve problems together. Meetings can help get that work done. This publication can help you learn about how your family can work together to make family meetings successful.

Starting positively

If everyone agrees to be positive in a family meeting, the meeting will be more successful. The group can be more positive by

- agreeing on what will get done, how it will get done, and when the meeting will be over
- listening when others are speaking
- not speaking for others
- making sure their comments are recorded correctly
- not judging the comments of others
- making their comments clear and to the point.

You can post these “ground rules” during the meeting. Everyone should agree to the rules at the beginning of each meeting. For example, if your family tends to interrupt each other, the group might want to agree at the beginning of each meeting to listen while others are speaking.

A person called a “facilitator” can help a group agree on how things will get done during a meeting. A person called a “recorder” can help by writing down what has happened during a meeting. What has been written down by the recorder at the meeting is called the “group memory.” During a family meeting, one family member can act as the meeting facilitator, and one member can act as the meeting recorder. In small families, one person may be both the recorder and facilitator.

Agreeing on the meeting process

A meeting has two parts. The “what” part of a meeting is called “the content,” and the “how” part of a meeting is “the process.” To have a successful meeting, the family must take care of *what* and *how*. Only your family can decide what they what to do.

The facilitator makes sure all family members agree to the time, place, and purpose of the meeting. During the meeting, the facilitator suggests ways for the family to get the work done and helps make everyone a part of the meeting



Working on a problem

Meetings sometimes deal with problems. Ways to solve problems include:

Sharing feelings about the problem

Write a problem statement.

Agree on a problem statement.

Analyzing the problem

List information—when, where, and how.

Ask why, why, why this happens.

List helpers and blockers.

Getting solutions

Say or write as many solutions as the group can think of in ten or fifteen minutes.

Agreeing on a solution

Check to see if some of the solutions can be grouped together or dropped from the list.

Take a vote or ask each family member what they can live with.

The recorder and the group memory

The recorder writes a summary of what is said and what was decided on large sheets of paper (“poster tablets”). Washable felt markers are good for this. Use masking tape to hang the paper up so everyone can read it. The recorder uses an outline form and numbers each sheet so everyone knows the order in which things were said. Changing pen colors helps separate and highlight ideas.

Everyone checks the group memory to make sure their statements were recorded correctly. The group

memory does not tell who said what, so the ideas belong to the group.

The facilitator’s job

If the family disagrees or gets off track, the facilitator can point to the last area of agreement on the group memory to refocus the group. If someone brings up the same point over and over, the facilitator can point to the idea on the group memory and ask the speaker if the idea has been summarized. Reminding everyone that meeting time is limited can help with those that take a long time to get to the point. Those that are silent or not paying attention can be asked if they have anything to add. They may be feeling that their comments do not interest the group.

Looking for success: the ending

At the end of a meeting, the family can review the work they did and take a few minutes to appreciate what was accomplished. They can talk about what went well and what could be changed to make the family meetings better.

The time and purpose for the next meeting can be decided. The group memory should be stored unless someone has agreed to type it.

It’s good to have a positive way to formally end a family meeting. Some families use a moment of silence or a song, others a chant or a prayer. Holding hands in a circle or exchanging hugs can make everyone feel good. It’s important that everyone feels that he or she is an important part of the family.

“None of us is as smart as all of us.”

– African saying