

Why have Family Meetings?

An excerpt from *Positive Discipline* By Jane Nelsen

Holding regular Family Meetings is one of the most valuable things you can do as a family. Why?

Family Meetings provide an opportunity to teach children valuable social and life skills for good character. They will learn:

- Listening skills
- Brainstorming skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Mutual respect
- The value of cooling off before solving a problem. (Problems are put on the family meeting agenda so a cooling off period takes place before focusing on solutions to the challenge.)
- Concern for others
- Cooperation
- Accountability in a safe environment. (People don't worry about admitting mistakes when they know they will be supported to find solutions instead of experiencing blame, shame, or pain.)
- How to choose solutions that are respectful to everyone concerned
- A sense of belonging and significance
- Social interest
- That mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn
- To have fun as a family

Family Meetings provide an opportunity for parents to:

- Avoid power struggles by respectfully sharing control
- Avoid micromanaging children, so children learn self-discipline
- Listen in ways that invite children to listen
- Respectfully share responsibility
- Create good memories through a family tradition
- Model all of the skills they want their children to learn

If parents really understood the value of family meetings, it would be their most valuable parenting tool—and they would make every effort to schedule 15 to 30 minutes a week for family meetings.

Family Meeting Agenda:

- Compliments
- Challenges
 - Evaluate last week's solutions
 - Focus on solutions for this week's challenges
- Special Event
- Meal Planning
- Calendar
 - Weekly essentials such as events, who needs rides, etc.
 - Family togetherness event planning
 - Family Fun

Compliments:

Each component of the agenda is important. Start with compliments for several reasons:

- Compliments create a positive atmosphere

- Children learn to be “good finders” when they look for and verbalize the things they appreciate about family members.
- Children usually fight less when they participate in regular family meetings beginning with compliments.
- It is important to have each member of the family give a compliment to every other member of the family so everyone feels a sense of belonging and significance.
- Remember that compliments may sound awkward in the beginning. They get better with practice.

You will create a positive atmosphere in your family when everyone learns to look for the good in each other and to verbalize positive comments. Please don't expect perfection. Some sibling squabbling is normal. However, when children (and parents) learn to give and receive compliments, negative tension is reduced considerably. Of course, a positive atmosphere is increased even more when families have regular family meetings to find solutions to problems.

Family Meeting Jobs:

Recorder: Be sure to have someone write down all the ideas that are brainstormed. It is so much fun to look at these ideas later – as much fun as looking at old family picture albums.

Circle the solution that works for everyone. Consensus is important in family meetings. If you can reach consensus, table this item and try again next week.

Chairperson: Rotate this job so everyone has a chance to be the “person in charge”. The Chairperson calls the meeting to order, asks for compliments to begin, and handles the Weekly Challenges page by announcing the next challenge to be solved and following the rest of the agenda.

Timekeeper: A timekeeper can keep everyone on track so the meeting doesn't go on and on and get boring.

Do's and Don'ts for Successful Family Meetings by Jane Nelsen

DO:

1. Remember the long-range purpose: To teach valuable life skills.
2. Post an agenda where family members can write their concerns or problems.
3. Start with compliments to set the tone by verbalizing positive things about each other.
4. Focus on solutions to problems. Teach children to brainstorm for as many solutions as possible. Have fun. Some suggestions can be silly or outrageous. Choose one suggestion (by consensus) that is practical and respectful to everyone and try it for a week.
5. When consensus can't be reached, table that item for more discussion next week.
6. Focus on solutions, not blame
7. Calendar a family fun activity for later in the week – and all sports and other activities (including a chauffeur schedule).
8. Keep family meetings short 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the ages of your children. End with a family fun activity, game, or dessert.

DON'T:

1. Use family meetings as a platform for lectures and parental control.
2. Expect perfection. Celebrate improvement. (See No. 5)
3. Skip weekly family meetings. (They should be the most important date on your calendar.)
4. Forget that mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn.
5. **Forget that 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 as well. Even solutions that don't work provide an opportunity to learn and try again—always focusing on respect and solutions.
6. Expect children under the age of four to participate in the process. (If younger children are too distracting, wait until they are in bed.)