

# 9 Steps for Effective Family Meetings

## Objectives:

- To provide practice using the 9 Steps for Effective Family Meetings.
- To help parents understand that there is no such thing as a perfect family meeting, and that practice makes better.

## Materials:

- Talking stick (or something to represent a talking stick) for each group of 4
- Notebook (or paper) for Agenda for each group of 4
- Challenges and Characteristics and Life Skills lists from the Two Lists Activity.
- 9 Steps for Effective Family Meetings and Tips for Successful Family Meetings (back to back handout) for everyone.

## • 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 love and responsibility (belonging and significance). Parents have the opportunity to avoid power struggles and to model the characteristics and life skills they hope their children will develop when they invite shared problem-solving instead of lecturing and micromanaging.

## Directions:

1. Pass out the Tips for Successful Family Meetings and Cautions and invite participants to take turns reading the Tips and the Cautions first.
2. Divide into groups of four (one or two groups can include 3 if not enough people to make groups of four) and ask them to decide who will play different roles in their family (two co-parents and two children, 1 parent and 3 children, etc.). The children should be at least 4 years old and older.
3. Have them turn over the handout to the *9 Steps for Effective Family Meetings* so they can follow along.
4. Provide a “talking stick” and an “agenda” to a parent in each group and ask him or her to go through all of the 9 *Steps*—reading (and then doing) each one as though they are in a family meeting. (If the children are old enough, an option is to have

them take turns reading the steps and then doing what each step says to do.)  
Allow about 15 minutes.

5. When time is up, ask if anyone would like to share what went on in their family meeting—successes/challenges.
6. Then process with those who role-played 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)
7. Ask the parents what they were thinking, feeling and deciding. Point to the Characteristics and Life Skills list and ask them if they can find things that they were modeling.
8. Ask all participants to share what they learned from this activity. (See Facilitators Note below for answers to some typical questions.)

**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. 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.

**ALTERNATE ACTIVITY:**

9. Ask for four people to demonstrate a family meeting using the 9 Steps for Effective Family Meetings in front of the rest of the group.
10. Interrupt and coach as needed if they miss any of the steps or don't heed the 5 cautions.
11. Process by going through steps 4 through 8 above.

## 9 Steps for Effective Family Meetings

1. **Introduction:** “Welcome to our family meeting. We will read these steps and practice each one until we all know them well enough to have family meetings without reading them.”
2. **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. Who would like to start with No. 3?” (If children are old enough, they can take turns reading the steps.)
3. **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.)
4. **Family meeting agenda:** “The agenda will be placed on the refrigerator so everyone can write down problems during the week. You’ll notice that **everyone not being dressed and ready to go when it is time to leave in the morning** is on the agenda for us to practice problem-solving.”
5. **Teach about Focusing on Solutions and Brainstorming:** “Brainstorming means thinking of as many solutions as we can. All ideas are okay (even funny ideas). We will write down every idea without discussion. Let’s practice with the problem on our 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.)
6. **Encourage the children 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 leaving in our pajamas, or those who aren’t ready can walk?” Allow for silence. If someone objects to any ideas, say, “For now we are just brainstorming for solutions. All ideas will be written down.” (Be sure you have at least 4 suggestions. 6 are even better.)
7. **Use the 3 R's and an H to assess proposed solutions:** Encouraging solutions must be (1) Related, (2) Reasonable, (3) Respectful, and, (4) Helpful. “Who can see any suggestions that need to be eliminated because they are not related, reasonable, respectful, or helpful? Our scribe can cross them off after we discuss why.”
8. **Choosing the solution:** “Do we want to narrow it to one solution that we can all agree to, or try more than one? We can evaluate how the solution or solutions worked during our next meeting in one week.”
9. **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: Belonging (love) and Significance (Responsibility) and to teach valuable characteristics and life skills.
2. Have all family members sit around a table (not during a mealtime) 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 during the week.
4. Start with compliments to set the tone by verbalizing positive things about each other.
5. Focus on solutions for the future, not blame for the past.
6. Teach children that brainstorming means thinking of all the possible solutions to solve the challenge. "During the brainstorming time all ideas are okay (even those that are silly or outrageous). We will write down every suggestion without discussion. When we are finished, we will use the 3 R's and an H to eliminate any that are not Related, Reasonable, Respectful, and Helpful."
7. 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.)
8. When consensus can't be reached (and it is practical to use only one suggestion), table that item for more discussion next week.
9. 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).
10. Keep family meetings short, 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the ages of your children.
11. End with a family fun activity, game, or dessert.
12. 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-solving 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.**