

Family Meeting Album



Dr. Jane Nelsen

OUR FAMILY MEETING ALBUM

[Insert Your Family Picture Here]

Introduction

Children learn so much during family meetings, such as listening, respecting differences, verbalizing appreciation, problem-solving, experiencing that mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn, and focusing on solutions. I have a much longer list, but you get the idea. Family meetings also create a family tradition and will create many memories.

A family meeting album can be as much fun as a photo album. You and your family will chuckle as you look back at past challenges you solved together. You will enjoy looking at your family mottos, gratitude pages, mistakes you learned from, problems you solved, fun things you did together, and meals you planned.



How to Use This Family Meeting Album

Start by pasting a picture of your family on the cover page. Place the cover (with your family picture) on the cover of a binder that provides a clear plastic place to insert your picture.

Begin by reading, "Why Have Family Meetings", "The Family Meeting Agenda" and "Family Meeting Jobs".

Print out several weekly challenges pages (all pages that are blank except for headings are at the end of this document, and can be printed over and over) on three hole punched paper, and introduce them at your first family meeting. Every week post a new Family Meeting Agenda page on the refrigerator (or wherever works for your family) so that family members can write down the challenges that need to be solved. When finished, save each page in your family meeting album.

As you read through the rest of "Why Have Family Meetings," and the "Family Meeting Agenda," you will learn about compliments and other "pages" and activities to spice up your family meetings.

Enjoy!



Why have Family Meetings?

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

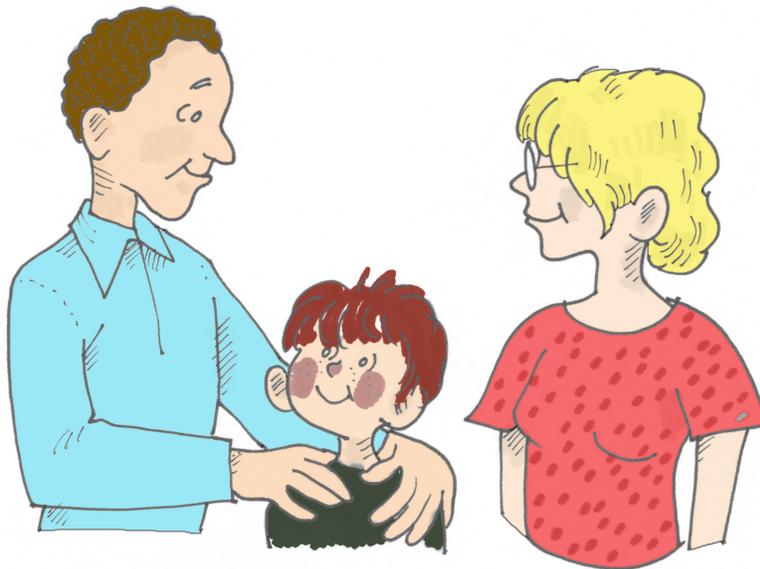
Family Meetings provide an opportunity to teach children valuable social and life skills for good character. They will learn:

- 1) Listening skills
- 2) Brainstorming skills
- 3) Problem-solving skills
- 4) Mutual respect
- 5) The value of cooling off before solving a problem. (Problems are put on the weekly agenda so a cooling off period takes place before focusing on solutions to the challenges.)
- 6) Concern for others
- 7) Cooperation
- 8) 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.)
- 9) How to choose solutions that are respectful to everyone concerned
- 10) A sense of belonging and significance
- 11) Social interest
- 12) That mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn

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 the skills they want their children to learn

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



Steps for Effective Family Meetings

- 1) Family meetings should be held once a week. After a time has been decided upon for family meetings, nothing should interfere. If friends call, tell them you will call back later. Do not skip a family meeting because you are busy or have something else to do. Your children will follow your lead in determining the importance of family meetings. Once the tradition has been effectively established, everyone will look forward to this opportunity for family togetherness.
- 2) Decisions should be made by consensus. If the family cannot come to a decision by consensus on an agenda item, it should be tabled until the next meeting, when it is likely that a consensus will be reached because of the additional cooling off period and time to think of new ideas. Convey an attitude of faith in your family that you can work together to find solutions that are respectful to everyone.
- 3) Family meetings should include a review of the next week's activities. This is especially important as the children grow older and become involved in many activities, such as baby sitting, sports, dates, lessons, and so on. Coordinating the calendar for car use and mutual convenience can be essential.
- 4) Family meetings should not end without planning a family fun activity during the coming week. And special time with each child.
- 5) End the meeting by doing something together as a family. You might want to play a game together, pop popcorn, take turns making and serving desserts. Do not watch TV unless there is a program that the whole family looks forward to. If you do watch a TV program, be sure to end by turning off the TV and having a family discussion about what values (or lack thereof) were portrayed, and how this might apply in your lives.

6) Sitting at a cleared table is conducive to staying on task for problem solving. The table does not seem to be the barrier for families that desks are in a classroom. Sitting informally in a living room can also work, but it seems difficult to stay on task if a family meeting is part of dinnertime.



Family Meeting Agenda

- 1) Compliments
- 2) Evaluate last week's solutions
- 3) Focus on solutions for this week's challenges
- 4) Meal Planning Calendar
- 5) Weekly planning such as events, who needs rides, etc.
- 6) Family togetherness event planning (including special time)
- 7) Family Fun Activity (game, treats, etc.)



Compliments

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

- 1) Compliments create a positive atmosphere
- 2) Children learn to be "good finders" when they look for and verbalize the things they appreciate about family members.
- 3) Children usually fight less when they participate in regular family meetings beginning with compliments.
- 4) 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.
- 5) 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 Activity: Compliments

- 1) Place blank compliment sheets on the refrigerator (or another spot) where every one can write down compliments for others during the week. (Young children can dictate their compliments to older members of the family.)
- 2) When you see someone that deserves a compliment, write it down or ask a child who also observed something someone else did, "Would you like to write that on our compliment sheet?" Once children develop the habit of noticing compliments, they won't need reminders.
- 3) At the beginning of each family meeting, family members can read their compliments.
- 4) Ask for any verbal compliments that were not written down.
- 5) Make sure every family member receives at least one compliment.
- 6) Place this compliment sheet in the family meeting binder, and place another blank sheet on the refrigerator to be filled out during the week.

Family Meeting Agenda

The family meeting agenda provides a place where family members can list all problems and challenges that occur during the week. They can look forward to having fun as a family, *focusing on solutions* during the once a week family meeting.

There are many benefits from posting a family meeting agenda on the refrigerator or any handy place for easy access.

- 1) Whenever a problem occurs, someone can remember to say, "Who would like to put this problem on the family meeting agenda?"
- 2) It is very helpful to teach children (and to learn yourself) that it is not effective to try solving a problem at the time of conflict when everyone is upset. When we are upset, we are accessing our "primitive brains" where the only options are fight or flight. No one can be rational for speaking or for listening. Putting a problem on the family meeting agenda allows for a "cooling" off period before it is discussed. *Problems are best solved during "no conflict time."*
- 3) Seeing a problem on the agenda usually creates an atmosphere of cooperation so that the problem is often solved before the family meeting.
- 4) Put each item on a "Problem or Challenge" page. During the family meeting, decide on a specific amount of time to spend on brainstorming for solutions to challenges. Then discuss the challenges in the order that they appear on the family meeting agenda, unless everyone agrees to discuss another issue first. Suppose you decide that 15 minutes is enough time to spend on challenges. You may spend the whole 15 minutes on one challenge and not get to the rest. This is fine. The other challenges can wait. With experience, your family may get through several challenges in 15 minutes.

Problem or Challenge Solution Pages

Be sure to have plenty of blank Problem or Challenge Solution pages so you can use one to write down the brainstormed solution possibilities for each challenge. You'll want to circle the chosen solution and place it in your family meeting album.

You don't need to spend much time of evaluating last week's solutions. Family members might want to share how it worked. If it didn't work, don't discuss the problem at this time. Simply ask someone to put it on the agenda for next week.



Calendar

Bring a calendar to each meeting so you can go over weekly essential events such as soccer (or other sports) games, recitals, shopping trips for necessary items, homework help with special projects, etc. can be put on the calendar. Be sure to schedule who need rides. You might have conflicting events so a child can be given the responsibility to find a ride with a friend.

Take time to plan a monthly (at least) family event and put it on the calendar. This could be anything the family likes to do together. Perhaps a trip to the park, bowling, skating, a hike, a bike ride—and once in a while a family vacation. So often we plan to do things as a family but don't do it because we don't take the time to put it on the calendar.

JANUARY						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

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.

Gratitude Pages

An attitude of gratitude does not come naturally. It must be learned. Regular practice and sharing will help all family members develop an attitude of gratitude.

Family Meeting Activity: Gratitude

- 1) At the end of each family meeting, pass out a blank "Gratitude Page" for each family member. Encourage family members to put the page in a place where they can access it easily and write down the things for which they are grateful.
- 2) Allow time during family meals for people to share the things for which they are grateful.
- 3) During each family meeting, collect the Gratitude Pages, and place them in the family meeting album.

Family Mottos

Family Motto

“Mistakes Are Wonderful Opportunities to Learn!”

Your family can create closeness and have a great time discussing family mottos. You might want to choose a different motto every month and make them more meaningful through the suggested activities. Several examples are included. You may want to use some of these and/or create your own.

Sample Mottos:

- 1) One for all and all for one.
- 2) We love and support each other.
- 3) Anything worth doing is worth doing for the fun of it.
- 4) If it helps just one person, it is worth doing.
- 5) Mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn.
- 6) We are good finders.
- 7) We are problem-solvers.
- 8) We look for solutions rather than blame.
- 9) We have an attitude of gratitude.
- 10) We count our blessings every day.

Family Meeting Activity: Mottos

- Have the whole family choose a motto for the month.
- Week One: Give each family member a blank family motto sheet. Ask each family member to think about the motto during the week, and to write down their thoughts about what it means to them. (Set up special times to take dictation from children who are too young to write.)
- Week Two: Plan time during the family meeting for each person to share what they wrote. Place all these sheets in the binder. Pass out another blank motto sheet and invite everyone to find some time during the week to draw a picture that represents what the motto means to them. You might want to plan a special time when everyone does this together.
- Week Three: Plan time during the family meeting for each person to share their picture and talk about it. Place the pictures on the refrigerator, or some other place where everyone can enjoy them. Ask everyone to notice how they apply the family motto in action during the following week.
- Week Four: Plan time during the family meeting for each person to share an example of how they used the family motto in action. Invite family members to be thinking about another motto to begin the next month.
- Week One of the Next Month: Put all the drawings of the last motto in the binder. Choose another motto, and repeat the process described above.

Family Fun Time Planning

Many families do not spend enough time together doing fun things. Often, we have good intentions, but we don't take the time to plan and schedule events on a calendar. It is also important to plan some "Special Time" with each child. Special Time with your younger children can be just a few minutes a day. Special Time with your teenagers can be once



a week. [Click Here](#) to read more about special time with your teenager.

Family Meeting Activity: Fun Things to Do

- 1) During a family meeting use a "Fun Things to Do" sheet for a brainstorming session with the whole family under the "Together as a Family Column." See how many ideas you can generate for both free things to do and things that cost money.
- 2) Give a sheet to each family member so they can continue to list things they think of during the week, not only for the whole family, but for things to do alone. Husband and wife can also work on their list.
- 3) During family meetings, use your list to let the family choose something to place on the calendar for your "family event planning."

Family Meal Planning Pages

The Family Meal provides an excellent opportunity to teach cooperation and contribution. Even small children can take a turn cooking a simple meal such as soup and toasted cheese sandwiches, a vegetable, lettuce salad and Jello.

Family Meeting Activity: Meal Planning

- 1) During the family meeting, use a Family Meal Planning Page to get every family member involved in planning the meals for a week.
- 2) Bring magazines that contain recipes to the family meeting. Let children (and parents) choose new recipes they might want to try. (It can be fun to make a family cook book by cutting out the recipes and pictures and putting them in a binder. Family members might first want to rate the recipes for taste, and save only the ones that receive a high rating.)
- 3) Use 3x5 cards for recipes. On the back of the recipe, write all the ingredients needed from the store. (Save these cards in a special card index box so they can be used over and over.)
- 4) On shopping day, take the whole family to the grocery store. Children who are old enough, can take a basket and find all the ingredients listed on the back of one or two recipe cards. Younger children can help an older sibling or parent find the ingredients from other recipe cards.



Chore Planning

It is very important to teach children to be contributing members of society. This training begins in the home where they learn to contribute to the well being of the family by helping with the family work (chores).



Following is an excerpt from the book [*Positive Discipline*](#) on chores:

Discuss chores at a family meeting so that children can help solve the problems of getting them done. They are more cooperative when they can voice their feelings and be part of the planning and choosing.

At one family meeting, we listed all the chores done by Mom and Dad (including full-time employment) in an effort to eliminate "How come I have to do everything?" whenever we asked one of our children to do something. We then asked them to brainstorm a list of all the chores that could be done by children. We chimed in with all the things we could think of that they forgot. Still, their list wasn't nearly as long as ours. When they saw the comparison between what we ask of them and what we do, they were impressed. We then put the chores they could do on slips of paper that could be drawn from a jar each week. Each child drew four chores each week.

There was a new drawing every week so that one child was never stuck with the same chore, such as the garbage, all the time.

This is not a magic solution. We find that the problem of getting chores done is put on our agenda at least once a month. I call it the "three-week syndrome." The first week, the kids usually enthusiastically follow the chore plan they helped create. The

second week, they do their chores, but with less enthusiasm. By the third week they start complaining. That is our clue that chores should go on the family meeting agenda again.

After one of my lectures, a woman came up to me and said, "We tried a family meeting once, and the kids did their chores for about a week. But, then they stopped, so I didn't think it worked very well."

I asked, "Have you found anything else that motivates your kids to do their chores for a whole week?"

She said, "Well, no."

I said, "Sounds like a success to me. I suggest you keep doing it." I then told her about our three-week syndrome. Even though we need to keep working on it, we feel we get much greater cooperation by handling the problem through family meetings than any other way we have tried. We achieve great responsibility for a while. When it starts to slack off, we put it on the agenda.

The kids often come up with a new plan. For awhile they enjoyed using a chore wheel that they made from a paper plate with pictures of chores around the edge and a brad in the middle to fasten a spinner. They would spin for a few chores each week. Later they each enjoyed making a chore chart with pockets across the top for "undone" chores, and pockets across the bottom for "done" chores. They seemed to get a sense of accomplishment when they could move a chore card to the "done" row.

Dealing with the problem of chores every three or four weeks is far preferable to hassling over them every day. My last two (of seven) children came up with chore plan that worked for over six months instead of just three weeks. When they started to complain after the six month period, they found a solution that worked for more than a year:

They decided that I should put two major chores for each of them on the white board near our phone. During the negotiation time, I

wanted a rule that they should do these chores right after school. They wanted the freedom to choose the time of completion so long as the chores were done before they went to bed. I asked, "What happens if you don't do them before you go to bed?" They agreed that it would be a reasonable consequence for me to circle their name on the white board and then they would have to do all four chores the next day right after school. For six months this worked very well. Once in a while I would have to circle a name, and they would then do all four chores the next day right after school.

After six months, however, they both started to complain, asking, "How come he (or she) gets all the easy chores?" I had spent a lot of time trying to be fair by rotating the chores, but not from their point of view. I was so proud of myself that instead of lecturing about my fairness, I simply put the problem on the agenda. Their solution was so simple and so profound, I don't know why I didn't think of it sooner. It would have saved me a lot of work. Mark said, "Why don't you just put four chores on the board and first come first served." Once again I was reminded of what great solutions they can come up with when we give them a chance.

The first week they set their alarms to try beating each other to choose what they thought to be the easiest chores. However, that didn't last long. Soon they decided sleep was more important than easier chores, so the one who got to the board last accepted his or her fate with grace.

Involve your children in a discussion of getting chores done as often as it takes.

Family Meeting Activity: Chore Planning

- 1) Involve the whole family in brainstorming all the chores that need to be done to help create an organized, pleasant home.
- 2) Brainstorm to create a system that will work for everyone. It could be that everyone does their small chores at the same time every day— with big chores being done on Saturday morning. It could be activities mentioned above.
- 3) If you decide on a chore jar, a chore wheel, a chores not done and done chart, or any other system, let kids who are old enough create them.
- 4) Do not include rewards or tie chores to allowances. Allow you children to develop a sense of feeling good because they are learning responsibility, capability, and contribution.
- 5) When one system stops working, put the problem on the weekly challenges and start over again at the next family meeting.



Mistakes as Opportunities to Learn

One of the greatest life lessons you can teach your children is that "mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn."

Many of us grew up with unhealthy messages about mistakes: If I make a mistake I'm a bad person. I'm a failure. What will others think? If I make a mistake I better try to cover it up or blame someone else.

A healthier attitude is: I made a mistake. Isn't that exciting! I wonder what I can learn from it.

Instead of taking time during family meetings, start a tradition during dinner time of sharing mistakes and what you learned from them.



Family Meeting Activity: Learning from Mistakes

- 1) During the family meeting, pass out Mistakes I Made, and What I learned from Them pages to each family member.
- 2) Encourage family members to write down their mistakes and what they learned from them.
- 3) During dinner time, take turns sharing.
- 4) Place these pages in your Family Meeting Album.

Family Meeting Agenda

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Problem or Challenge _____

(Each one has its own special page)

Brainstorm ideas

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

Solution Chosen:

One week follow up. Evaluate how it worked:

(If it didn't work, put the problem on the agenda again.)

Gratitude Pages

Name _____

Date _____

Compliments

Family Member

Compliment

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

8)

9)

Family Meeting Motto Page

Fun Things to Do

Together as a Family

Special Time

For Parents

Family Meal Planning

This is a simple meal planning chart. You can create your own or there are some downloadable forms online. Here is one of our favorites. [Click Here](#)

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

Cook:

Main Dish:

Vegetable:

Salad:

Dessert:

Mistakes and What I learned from Them

Tips for Successful Family Meetings

- 1) Decide on an amount of time that sounds reasonable for everyone, and stick to the time. You can always renegotiate the amount of time as one of the challenges that can be put on the family meeting agenda.
- 2) Make sure every one has equal talking time by passing a "talking stick" around the circle. Only the person with the talking stick can talk. (Family meetings fail when parents talk too much and children see the meetings as just another platform for parents to lecture and control.)
- 3) Start with compliments. Each family member gives every other family member a brief compliment.
- 4) Focus on solutions to challenges. Helpful information that adds light on the subject is fine. Blame, attacks, defensiveness is to be avoided.
- 5) If someone has a complaint during a family meeting, invite that person to put the problem on the family meeting agenda for next week.
- 6) Children under the age of four may be too young to participate in family meetings. Some can sit and color or do some other quiet activity during the family meeting. Some families wait until the younger children are asleep to have family meetings.
- 7) End with a family fun time.
- 8) Enjoy!

[Click Here](#)

to read more about Family Meetings
and listen to a podcast.