

Eight Tips for Conducting Successful Family Meetings

Since most families are dealing with busy lives and hectic schedules, carving out enough time during the week to talk, make plans, and work out important issues together can prove to be very difficult. Many families have found that conducting planned “family meetings” is one way to regularly reconnect with each other, reinforce family values and strengthen family bonds. Families who hold regular family meetings are able to “air out” feelings and “iron out” unresolved issues before tempers flare and issues turn into full-blown crises. Sound intriguing? Give family meetings a try and see how they work for your family.

Following are eight tips for conducting successful family meetings:

1. **Schedule** a day and time when all family members can attend the entire meeting.
2. **Discuss** family concerns such as work and school assignments, recreational activities and complaints. Negotiating family rules may also be a topic of discussion.
3. **Give** each member the opportunity to talk and encourage each person to participate equally in the meeting.
4. **Make** sure someone leads the meeting and someone writes down the topics and all family decisions. It is very helpful to start each meeting by reviewing the notes from the previous meeting.
5. **Model**, practice and recognize effective communication skills and problem solving techniques. The way in which the adult family members conduct themselves during the meeting will teach the other members how to communicate and behave (good or bad) so be careful to practice what you preach.
6. **Encourage** participation by striving to understand other family members’ points of view.
7. **Make** decisions collectively to demonstrate that the family is a team working together.
8. **Schedule** time during the meeting to acknowledge and emphasize the positive things that happened and review any decisions reached. Discuss the day and time for the next family meeting.

Overall, family meetings provide an enormous opportunity for each family member to speak and communicate his or her feelings, thoughts and ideas. Engaging in caring conversations helps each person to understand and clarify his or own feelings, motivations and actions as well as those of other family members. Since there will always be some misunderstandings in families, scheduling and holding regular family meetings provides a vehicle for dealing with them. Most of us can probably remember a time in our life where having more information or better communication would have cleared up a misunderstanding and changed our behavior for the better. In fact, we have probably said something like, “I wish I had known that because then I would not have done what I did. I would have reacted differently.” Family meetings allow us the time to meaningfully communicate with the most important people in our lives, our family.