

## **Gaining Cooperation in the Family: Unleashing the Power of the Family Meeting**

Holding a family meeting can be a daunting undertaking! Our family found them to be invaluable over time. My wife and I must have used one line about a thousand times over the years when our kids would ask, “Can I ...?” or “When are we ...?” Little did we know what we had stumbled upon when we would say, “It looks like you have something you would like to talk about at the Family Meeting. Do you want to write that down or do you think you’ll be able to remember it.” Talk about a parent’s dream response to the barrage of questions that never seem to end!

It’s important to remember that the parents have the final decision on many things. Clothes will get washed, tables will get cleared and rooms will get cleaned, however, how and when that happens and who is doing it are all up for discussion. I encourage you to create your own Family Meeting style (ours began as Friday Fabulous Fun Night or FFFN). The following are things we found helpful.

### **Why Family Meetings?**

The Functional Goals of the Family Meeting:

- To coordinate the running of the household; schedule car pools and rides, chores, special events, vacations, and holiday planning.
- To get input from everybody about larger family decisions that will be made by the parents.
- To announce family decisions.
- To discuss serious family issues, come up with new ideas, and problem-solve.

Family Meetings help busy families:

- Stay connected
- Improve communication
- Build self-esteem by recognizing and building on qualities and strengths
- Provide emotional support
- Learn to problem solve effectively
- Set out expectations, roles, rules, and rewards/consequences
- Build closeness, participation, and a sense of belonging.

### **Scheduling and Facilitating the Family Meeting**

When scheduling family meetings, remember:

- Set a Family Meeting Time by asking your kids when they would like to have it. Give them some options that you know will work, solicit their input, and then start having the meetings.

- Plan the agenda ahead of time (**stick up an agenda idea list in the kitchen**).

We made a list of all the things that needed to be done in order to make sure that the family would run in a way that everyone got at least some of the things done that they thought were important. Laundry, dishes, pick-up rooms were the important things from Mom and Dad. Play dates, eating and free-time were the important kid issues.

Our typical agenda, once we got established, was: Reading of minutes, Old business, Calendar for upcoming week, Financial Transactions between parent / child, New business, Future Plans (focus on family fun)

When discussing the upcoming week, we would invite our kids to think about who they wanted a play date with and what day that might work. We would do our best to fulfill their request if they planned ahead, but we wouldn't go out of our way to make it happen if they didn't plan for it.

- Schedule meeting times far enough ahead of time that the particular time slot is empty on *every* family member's calendar. Family meetings are for everybody.

We eventually moved our meeting to Sunday evenings to help us prepare for the upcoming week. Family meeting attendance was optional for the whole family; however, if you chose to not attend you would need to abide by the decisions made at the family meeting. (One particular non-participant was watching TV instead and one of the kids had suggested we go without TV for the week - it was voted on and passed - that child didn't miss another meeting...)

- Take turns planning and facilitating the meetings.

We would take turns leading the meetings between the 5 of us. This developed leadership skills in each child. Each person could bring concerns or ideas to the meeting and would be heard by the group.

- Start with the Positive – everyone share something positive from their past week. First meeting(s) start with either just fun activity, or everyone sharing what they like about being in this family.

- Discuss issues and brainstorm ways to resolve the issues

One particular meeting, it was brought up that the kids were not putting dirty laundry where it needed to be when it was supposed to be there. **We asked the family what ought to be done if someone doesn't have their clothes where they were supposed to be... the family decided that we would have a week where everyone would "try" to remember.** After that the family would have a reminder - one-time announcement 10 minutes before the laundry deadline - and then it would be whoever was late needed to fold the laundry for the rest of the family.

I think the prior response would have been my wife and me lecturing the kids about what they needed to do and how we are doing things for them that they don't appreciate... blah, blah, blah, blah, blah!

## **Other Keys**

- Everyone Has a Voice:

The great thing about the meetings is the way everyone has a voice and there is a strong need for compromise.

- Enforce Decisions for One Week Only:

Everyone knows that the rules last for one week and then we'll re-evaluate until we find something that works for everyone over time.

- Focus on the positive. Family meetings aren't only gripe sessions focusing on *issues*. Take some time each meeting to eat popcorn, sing, show off silly costumes, enjoy your family.

## **Other Helpful Tips for Successful Meetings**

- Parents need to be committed – stick with it
- Stay within 20 to 40 minutes or attention may dwindle
- Set some type of routine; same day and time, weekly
- Post agenda to let everyone know what is happening
- Have special treats
- Keep it respectful and positive, have fun, tell stories and jokes, have a contest
- Design a meeting to fit your family; be flexible