

# Better Parenting: How Can Family Meetings Help Our Family Work Together Better? Part 1

By Sonia Spackman

You may have wondered where this column has been for the last few months. I have been in Florida at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville with my husband who was getting a liver transplant. The operation was a success, he is on the road to full recovery and we are happily back in the wonderful town of Vernonia. Thank you so much to everyone who has offered support to us in so many ways through this journey.

I bet you are wondering how a family meeting can help when you already see each other every day. I bet you are thinking meetings are for work, community or church not for families. I bet you even think, "My family never had meetings," when you were growing up.

You will be surprised at how the regular family meeting is an excellent way to get everybody interested in working together.

You will be amazed at how your kids begin to talk to you candidly about what is going on in their lives. They may become open to discussing their hopes, dreams and wishes with you. They may go as far as telling you problems and fears that they are having over time.

We all want to be closer as a family and help our kids the best we can. We can use the family meeting for a quick and snappy problem solving time for everyone to have their say.

For example, let's say you are trying to get dinner fixed and your kids

begin to complain about both wanting to watch their own TV program. You do not want to deal with this right now. So you point to a sheet of paper on the refrigerator, and say, "Let's talk about this at the family meeting this week. Write it down."

This is an example of one way family meetings help every day. You don't have to lose your temper. The kids know their problem will not be ignored and there is a good chance their problem will get solved.

Now you are possibly wondering how you can fit this family meeting into an already busy schedule. Getting into the habit of family meetings does take time. Here are some ideas to help you:

- Try to meet at a regular time. Plan the meeting to last from 20 to 30 minutes. Younger children need shorter meetings more often. With the younger kids start with a fun short game they enjoy like an Old Maid card game. After the meeting have an ice cream cone or go for a walk or bike ride.
- Share good things that have happened. Some people have a piece of paper posted on the refrigerator then add things during the week to discuss at the family meeting. Maybe everyone can vote on one or two subjects they want to cover at the meeting.
- Family meetings are for all families – one parent or two, one child or many and step families, too. Some families with two parents have only one who wants to have family meetings. This is okay. The other might join in later. If not, keep

up the meetings anyway. This still gives you a chance to help your kids enjoy each other.

- Plan family fun. Do things you all enjoy. You might make homemade pizza together after the meeting. You could have a "fun jar" with the ideas your family came up with written on pieces of paper. This can show that you value fun as much as problem solving. You can go for a family walk or play a game after the meeting.

- If you are a single parent – you work hard for your family. Family meetings can help you, too. The family meeting is to help the people who live together get along better. If your child wants to talk about problems centered on the parent who is not there, the family meeting is not the place to do this. Children need to talk about these problems. Tell your child that you will talk to them about this later.

- If you are a single parent with one child, you may be thinking, "My child and I are together all the time." The family meeting does many things that togetherness will not always do. It lets you set aside time to solve problems. Family meetings help you and your child become close and more cooperative together.

- Step families need meetings as much as other families do. In a newer step family children have not lived together long.

- Always start family meetings on a positive note, not in response to a crisis or argument. One of the things I did with troubled foster kids was ask them each

day when they got home from school what the "best thing" and the "worst thing" of the day was for them. I had no lectures, advice or suggestions for either, I thanked them for sharing their thoughts with me. This was one of the most helpful things I did and it was a way for them to open their hearts and share their feelings.

- Start with issues that you think will be easy to talk about such as family fun. After a few meetings you can start on the "harder" issues. You might talk about chores or a problem that is bothering the kids.

- Keep non family issues such as noncustodial adults out of your meetings. Talk about those privately.

I can imagine this is a new concept for many of you. I will give more details on the basics of having the family meeting next time.

If you have any questions or suggestions for a column feel free to e-mail me at [soniaspackman@msn.com](mailto:soniaspackman@msn.com).

*References, Don Dinkmeyer, Sr., Gary D. McKay and Don Dinkmeyer, Jr. STEP, American Guidance Services, Inc.*



## WANTED Volunteers for Jamboree

The Vernonia Friendship Jamboree and Logging Show is an annual event which welcomes visitors, residents and old friends to celebrate and showcase our community with food, music, activities and events.



*The Jamboree  
Committee - your  
friends and neighbors  
who make this event  
happen each year.*

**WE NEED YOU!**

Join the Committee!  
We meet the 2nd Wednesday of each month.

**WE NEED YOUR  
SKILLS**



**IDEAS**

**INTELLIGENCE**



**ENERGY**

We could use your help with:

- Set up/Tear down
- Traffic Control
- Logistics
- Planning
- Info Booth
- Music Coordination
- Electrical Specialist
- Vendor Coordination
- Parade Assistant
- Parade Registration

**VOLUNTEER AND GET ONE OF THE YELLOW T-SHIRTS!**



For more information to volunteer and help make Jamboree happen contact:

**Megan at (971)254-6826 or  
[Volunteer@VernoniaFriendshipjamboree.com](mailto:Volunteer@VernoniaFriendshipjamboree.com).**

## Vernonia Volunteer Firefighter's



### 7th Annual Pancake Feed!

**Saturday, April 25th**

**7:00am~Noon**

**Vernonia Fire Station**

**Pancakes ~ Eggs ~ Sausage ~ Ham  
Coffee & Juice**

**Payment by Donation Only**

**Fire Truck Rides  
Meet Fire Pup  
Blood Pressure Checks**

**Vernonia Volunteer Ambulance  
Association's Garage Sale  
Proceeds Benefit  
4th of July Fireworks**