

Better Parenting: Guidelines for Family Meetings - Part 2

By Sonia Spackman

Invite your family to start having regular meetings. Agree on a time for the first meeting. Before you meet, read this column completely. When you meet, explain the purpose of family meetings.

- To share good feelings
- To have fun together
- To make plans
- To talk about problems and help each other.
- Keep the first meeting short.
- Agree on a time for the next meeting.
- Don't expect to have a "perfect" meeting. You are just getting started!
- The most important thing is for everyone to feel their ideas are important.

Making a family meeting work takes time and effort. Here are some ideas to help you get started.

Single-Parent Families

There can be a tendency to talk about problems concerning the parent that is not present in a single parent family. Children need to talk about these problems. The family meeting is not the place to do this. Family meetings are to help people who live together get along better.

Two Parent Family with One Involved

Some families with two parents have only one who wants to have family meetings. This is okay. Start to have meetings without the other adult. After a while your partner may see how the meetings work and decide to join in.

One Parent-One Child Family

You may ask, "Why should I have family meetings when we are together all the time?" The family meeting does many things that daily "togetherness"

will not always do. It lets you set-aside time to talk about problems. It gives you time to focus on good things too. Family meetings help you and your child become closer.

Step-Families

In step families children are continually learning to relate to each other. It is important to start the family meeting on a positive note, not in response to a crisis or argument. Start with issues you think would be easy to talk about such as family fun. After a few meetings you can start on the "harder" issues, such as chores or one problem the kids are having. Keep non-family issues such as non-custodial adults out of your meetings.

Here are some ideas that may help:

- Meet at a time when there are no distractions like meal time, TV or anyone answering their phones. Maybe once a week plan to have a meeting that lasts from twenty to thirty minutes. Younger children need shorter meetings, ten to fifteen minutes, more often.
- Post meeting topics on the refrigerator. The family can add to it during the days before the meeting. This helps keep track of everyone's concerns without much time or wasted effort.
- Look at the meeting list. Decide which topics you can cover at the first meetings. Leave time to explore alternatives and make decisions.
- Take turns with different tasks during the family meeting. The leader reads the meeting list and keeps things on track. Young children will help do this. It's important to let each person have a chance to lead.
- Write down the agreements and plans

made in the meeting, so no one will forget or be confused. Take turns doing the note taking. Older children can read the notes to children who can't read. Younger children could put the notes on the refrigerator.

- When talking, let your children speak first. This helps them feel responsible. If a child hasn't talked, ask the child, "What do you think?" If a child talks too much, stay respectful. You could say, "It sounds like this is important to you. We need to hear how everyone feels about it." If someone is not showing respect, use an I-message: "When I hear name-calling, I feel worried, because I want us to work together. So I need people to talk without name-calling. I thank you for that."

- Complaining won't solve problems or help families enjoy each other. If complaining is a problem, ask, "What do we want?" How can we get what we want?"

- To start choosing chores, volunteer for some of the chores no one likes. You might say: "I'll clean the cat box and the bathroom. Who will vacuum and dust?" As time goes on expect others to do some of the "icky" chores too. One way to take turns is by using a job jar. Talk together about all the jobs that need to be done each week, write them on slips of paper and put them in a jar. Each week, draw jobs out of the jar.

- Stick to agreements until next meeting. If people want to change the agreement, they can do it then. Children and parents are expected to do what they agree to do.
- If one day you don't do something you agreed to, tell your family you are sorry.

Tell them you will work to do a better job. A child might sometimes forget or not have enough time. No one is perfect. If broken agreements continue, make a "work before fun" rule for everyone.

- To take time to add fun to the meetings, you can you can thank each other for some help given during the week or ask people to talk about what is going well for them now. Plan to do something you all enjoy like watching a family favorite video or choosing from a "Fun Jar" with ideas for family fun.
- Have fun after the meeting. Play a game, go for a walk or a bike ride, something that all can participate in and enjoy.

A Continuing Family Meeting Plan

1. Share good things that have happened
2. Read the notes from the last meeting
3. Talk about "old business"- things from the last meeting
4. Talk about "new business"- things people want to talk about at this meeting
5. Plan something fun to do
6. Repeat what people have agreed to
7. At the end of the meeting ask:
 - What should we keep the same?
 - What should we do more of?
 - What should we do less of?

Many families have found that these family meetings are a way to strengthen your family. In addition, as time passes you may be surprised to see how you have prevented problems as you see your children mature well.

Sonia A. Ford, MA, MFT, adapted from American Guidance Service, S.T.E.P., Don Diaz, More Fool Proof Family Meeting Tips, internet.

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



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INTELLIGENCE



ENERGY



We could use your help with:

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- 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.

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Book

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