

# LESSONS IN COMMUNICATION

FAMILY MEETINGS

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# FAMILY MEETINGS

- Direct communication: a way to reconnect once a week.
- Brainstorm ideas: inspiring and playful.
- Structured problem-solving: intelligent and goal-oriented.
- Planning and scheduling: creates quality and order.
- Making decisions together: logistics about schedules, plans, fun, etc.
- Safe place to air difficult subjects, forgive and/or work out grievances.

The first few meetings may feel clumsy and self-conscious if you haven't tried this before. However, the benefits of discussing ideas, needs, values and complaints as well as planning work and play in a safely structured setting reinforce the pattern for kind and respectful living at home. Help all of the members of the family participate as equally as possible (incorporate younger children as you can). The meeting notes and agendas may become a part of a family scrapbook.

## MEETING FORMAT INSTRUCTIONS

- **GOALS:** Meeting goals are communication, understanding and agreement
- **MARRIAGE MEETINGS:** If you wish, this may be a Marriage (or Partnership) Meeting for a couple.
- **WIN/WIN OUTCOMES:** Focus on win/win outcomes--solving problems (rather than complaining or arguing).
- **ALL ARE HEARD:** Take care to listen and to hear desires/opinions, not to judge or to give advice. Fairness maintains trust and makes the meeting effective.

## Logistics:

- **TIME:** Same time weekly, about 30 to 60 min. (be respectful and stay on time). Longer discussions are tiring and can defeat the purpose. If you need more time, schedule another meeting.
- **AGENDA:** Post an agenda so anyone can add an item for consideration.
- **CHAIRPERSON:** Rotating chairperson like in a business setting, keeps the meeting focused on the agenda items and on time.
- **SECRETARY:** Have someone make notes of the meeting and a short summary. To write down the agreed-upon commitments and to make sure the agenda is up-dated and posted for the next meeting. (This can be the Chairperson.)
- **QUALITY AND RESPECT:** Use respectful and safe communication techniques (\*see below).

## Meeting Procedure:

1. Read minutes of last meeting.
2. Discuss 'Old Business' items.
3. 'New Business' from the agenda (posted during the week so members can add to the agenda) and/or What's new this week?
4. Celebrate your successes.
5. Summarize points discussed and agree on individual commitments or compromises, who agrees to do what by when.
6. Set next meeting time. Post the new agenda.

## The Agenda:

Every meeting needs an agenda and so does a Family Meeting. Here's a suggestion:

- **POST IT:** Post an agenda somewhere obvious, like on the refrigerator door after the meeting. Or at the beginning of the week by the next Chairperson/ Meeting Leader.
- **ADDING TOPICS:** Anyone can add anything to the agenda. Family members have up until one hour (or whatever you decide) before the meeting to add topics. Then it is the job of the Meeting Leader to decide on the order. If you have a computer print out the agenda for the meeting. Every Meeting Leader decides on style, font and illustrations.
- **BRAINSTORMING:** Always leave time at the end for brainstorming. This part can be the most fun. For some discussion topics, see [parentcoachplan.com](http://parentcoachplan.com). This is also the time to add anything that is urgent or that someone forgot to add to the list.

Family members' weekly schedule, tasks and activities, the next vacation, etc.

Discuss problems or issues.

Plan family fun, meals, quality time and discuss what happened last week, etc.

## \*SAFE COMMUNICATION

1. **Focusing:** Choose agenda item.
2. **Sharing:** Discuss philosophical ideas or situations. Or a conflict is presented: the person involved shares ideas or airs a grievance courteously without manipulative emotion.
3. **Mirroring:** The other person(s) reflect what they heard by 'mirroring' the speaker's ideas without emotion. They may begin their sentence with: "What I heard you say is..." Person either confirms accuracy of the mirror or re-phrases the point for accuracy. Speaking and mirroring continues until clarity or understanding is achieved.
4. **Problem-Solving:** Person asks for what they need. Other person(s):
  - a) mirrors,
  - b) checks for accuracy and
  - c) either agrees or asks permission to suggest a compromise.

Recommended Resources:

For a good list of topics and questions for exploring the topics, see: [parentcoachplan.com/family\\_topics.php](http://parentcoachplan.com/family_topics.php)

*Our Family Meeting Book: Fun and Easy Ways to Manage Time, Build Communication, and Share Responsibility Week by Week* by Michele Borba, Elaine Hightower and Betsy Riley  
[wholefamily.com](http://wholefamily.com)

For detailed instructions on family meetings including ideas when an elderly parent needs care and when a social worker might attend the meeting for special assistance.  
[caregiver.org](http://caregiver.org)



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# MEETING AGENDA

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

**Old Business**

**New Business**

<b>To Do</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>By When</b>

SHORT TERM FAMILY GOALS – Less than a year

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LONG TERM FAMILY GOALS – One Year, Five Year and Ten Year Goals.

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Choose a topic each week for discussion during family meetings. Discuss these questions as a family and give each individual (who is old enough) an opportunity to answer or provide input.

### **SELF ESTEEM**

1. What is it that makes you special?
2. What is it about yourself that you are most proud of?
3. What special talents or abilities do you have?
4. Tell each family member what you appreciate most about them.

### **TAKING INITIATIVE**

1. What does it mean to "take initiative?"
2. Name three things that you have done lately to demonstrate initiative.
3. What can you do this week to show that you are taking initiative?
4. How would things be different in your home if nobody took initiative?

### **BEING HELPFUL**

1. What does it mean to be helpful?
2. Who was then past person that you helped? How did you help that person?
3. Who was the last person that helped you? How did that person help you?
4. Is there ever a time when you should NOT help someone? Explain.

### **SEEKING ATTENTION**

1. What does it mean to seek positive attention? Give examples.
2. What are some of the ways that YOU seek attention? Are these positive ways?
3. What are some new ways that you could seek positive attention?
4. How does it make you feel when nobody notices you seeking positive attention?

### **BEING RESPONSIBLE**

1. What does it mean to be responsible?
2. Name three things that you have done lately to demonstrate responsibility.
3. What can you do this week to show that you are being responsible?
4. How would things be different in your home if nobody was responsible?

### **WHO ARE YOU?**

1. How would you describe yourself to someone who has never met you?
2. What are your goals for the future?
3. How would your parents describe you? your teacher? your friends? your enemies?
4. What makes you different from each family member? Similar to each family member?

### **PATIENCE**

1. What does it mean to be patient?
2. Give examples of times when people need to be patient.
3. In which situations do you have a tough time being patient?
4. What can you do to become a more patient person?

### **NATURAL CONSEQUENCES**

1. What are "natural consequences?"
2. Give an example of a natural consequence that happened to you.
3. Discuss the natural consequences of smoking, dropping out of school, and doing drugs.
4. What is the best way to avoid natural consequences?

### **BEING THANKFUL**

1. List three things that you are thankful for. Why are you thankful for these things?
2. How do you show that you are thankful for something?
3. Have you done anything lately that someone should be thankful for? Explain.
4. Tell each person in your family one thing that they have done that you are thankful for.

## CHOICES

1. List three choices that you have already made today.
2. What is the best choice that you have ever made? What is the worst choice?
3. What are some important choices that you will need to make as you get older?
4. Give examples of how specific "bad choices" can affect someone's life.

## GENEROSITY

1. What does it mean to be generous?
2. Give examples of times when you were generous.
3. Give examples of times when someone else was generous to you.
4. What does it mean to be greedy? How is being greedy different than being generous?

## HYGIENE

1. What does it mean to have "good hygiene?"
2. Why is it important to have good hygiene?
3. Do you think you have good hygiene? Why or why not?
4. What could you do to demonstrate better hygiene?

## SAFETY

1. What does it mean to be safe?
2. What safety rules are in place in your home? How do these rules keep you safe?
3. What unsafe behaviors have you exhibited lately? How do you plan to change this?
4. Discuss measures that should be taken each day by family members to assure safety.

## EMPATHY

1. What does it mean to be "empathetic" or "compassionate?"
2. In what ways do you show empathy or compassion? Give specific examples.
3. What does it mean to "walk a mile in someone else's shoes?" Why is this important?
4. Can you think of anyone right now that could benefit from empathy? Take action.

## FAIRNESS

1. What does it mean to be fair?
2. Why is it important to be fair?
3. Give some examples of things in your life that you think are unfair.
4. Are there things that you do to others that could be considered unfair? Explain.

## SELF-SOOTHING

1. What are "self-soothing techniques?" (self-calming behaviors)
2. Give examples of three self-soothing techniques that work for you.
3. Give examples of times that you could use these techniques to help you.
4. Give examples of times when you DID use self-soothing techniques to calm down.

## HONESTY

1. What does it mean to be honest? Give several examples.
2. Why is it important to be honest?
3. Is there ever a time when it is okay to be dishonest?
4. Give an example of a time when you were dishonest. How did this make you feel?

## SPORTSMANSHIP

1. What does it mean to be a "good sport?" Give examples.
2. Why is it important to show good sportsmanship?
3. Why do you think some people choose to be "poor sports?" What motivates them?
4. Do you consider yourself a good sport? Why or why not?

## **COURAGE**

1. What does it mean to be courageous?
2. Describe at least one time when YOU were courageous?
3. Name a person who is famous as a result of being courageous. What did he or she do?
4. Do you know anyone who is courageous? Who? Why is this person courageous?

## **ASSERTIVENESS**

1. What does it mean to be "assertive?"
2. Give examples of times when you should speak assertively.
3. Use an assertive voice to tell another family member to "close the door."
4. Discuss the differences between passive, assertive, and aggressive voice tones.

## **LOYALTY**

1. What does it mean to be loyal?
2. Who or what do you show loyalty to? Why?
3. Discuss some of the negative causes that people become loyal to?
4. How do you show loyalty to your family? Friends? School? Team? City? Other?

## **FRIENDSHIP**

1. What does it mean to be a good friend?
2. What do you look for in a friend?
3. What qualities make you a good friend?
4. What is a "fair-weathered friend?" Do you know anyone like this?

## **RELAXATION**

1. List some of the ways that you like to relax.
2. Do you ever have times when you find it difficult to relax? When? Why?
3. How often do you get a chance to relax? Is this too often or not often enough?
4. Is it possible to relax when you are angry? Nervous? Tired? Sad? Excited? Bored?

## **FORGIVENESS**

1. Why is it important to forgive others?
2. Are there any behaviors that are NOT forgivable? Explain.
3. When was the last time someone forgave you for something you did wrong? Explain.
4. When was the last time you forgave someone for doing something wrong? Explain.

## **CITIZENSHIP**

1. What does it mean to be a good citizen? Give several examples.
2. What can you do to show that you are a good citizen (that you don't already do)?
3. What causes do you believe strongly in? (animal rights, recycling, civil rights, etc.)
4. How do you support the causes that you believe in? What else could you do?

## **PLAN A FAMILY OUTING**

1. Plan an outing for the whole family to participate in (within the next month).
2. Where will you go? (circus, camping, picnic, amusement park, zoo, beach, etc.)
4. When will you go? How will you get there?
5. What will you need to take with you?

## **FEELINGS**

1. Make a list of as many POSITIVE behaviors and NEGATIVE behaviors as you can.
2. List three things that make you really angry.
3. List three things that make you feel happy.
4. How are you feeling right now? Why?



## GOALS

1. What are your short-term goals?
2. What are your long-term goals?
3. How do you plan to meet each of these goals? How realistic are these goals?
4. Give examples of goals that you have already reached.

## HEALTH

1. Give examples of how a person can maintain a healthy mind.
2. Give examples of how a person can maintain a healthy body.
3. Do you have any unhealthy habits? Explain.
4. What can you do to become more healthy? Do you think you could do this?

## ATTITUDE

1. What does it mean to have a positive attitude? A negative attitude?
2. What do you think causes people to have a negative attitude?
3. How does your attitude affect the way people think about you or treat you?
4. What does it mean to be optimistic? Pessimistic? Which one are you? Explain.

## CLEANLINESS

1. What are the benefits of being clean? What are the consequences of being messy?
2. How does cleanliness relate to health? How does it relate to self-esteem?
3. What steps can YOU take to keep your home more clean and/or organized?
4. As a family, clean or organize a room or area of your home that really needs it.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. Describe a conflict that you were recently involved in. How was it resolved?
2. Make a list of ways to resolve various conflicts.
3. Why is it important to resolve conflicts peacefully?
4. Look in the newspaper (or on the news) and find a conflict. Discuss ways to resolve it.

## STRESS

1. What is stress? What do you stress about?
2. Discuss some ways to alleviate stress? What works best for you?
3. How do you tend to act when you are stressed?
4. Stress isn't always negative. Can you think of any stressful situations that are positive?

## AUTHORITY

1. What is an "authority figure?"
2. Who are the authority figures in your life? (list as many as you can)
3. Why is it important to obey authority?
4. Who do you have authority over? How would you handle someone who didn't obey you?

Thanks to [www.parentcoachplan.com/family\\_topics.php](http://www.parentcoachplan.com/family_topics.php)



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