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HOW TO RUN A FAMILY MEETING

The Family Meeting is a good way to start giving the kids more of a voice in household operations. You can use it to discuss not only discipline, but also such communal issues as laundry, allowances, bedtimes, renting movies, vacations, food, fights, etc. A good time to start is when the kids are in the primary grades in school. Don't try this when the children are three or four years old, because it will probably just aggravate you and confuse them.

Kids Will Cooperate Better

There are several reasons why the Family Meeting is a good idea. As the kids get older—and hopefully more rational—it is more appropriate that they have a bigger voice in the issues that affect them. Kids also will cooperate better when they have a say in what's going on. And finally, children need this kind of training for a later time when they have their own families.

The format of the meeting is very simple. Mom or Dad (not both at the same time) is the chairperson and has the responsibility for keeping order and staying on task. Older children can take a shot at running the meeting themselves from time to time. The chairperson sees to it that the agenda is followed and that each person gets a chance to speak without being interrupted.

Everyone Can Bring a Problem They Want to Resolve

Each person in the family can bring to the meeting a problem that he or she wants resolved. Then the chairperson guides the group through the following steps:

1. One person describes the problem to be discussed.
2. Every other person gives their thoughts and feelings about that problem.
3. Next, the floor is opened for proposals for solutions; anyone can speak, but one at a time.
4. A solution is agreed upon to be tried out. It may combine different aspects of the suggestions from different people. If there are disagreements, Mom and Dad have the final say. **Continued on page 2**



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5. The agreed-upon solution is written down on a piece of paper that is posted on the refrigerator, or it can be written in a Family Meeting journal, notebook or computer.
6. The next person brings up his or her problem, and steps 2-5 are repeated.

All solutions are considered experimental. If they don't work too well, they can always be reviewed at the next meeting. Proposals should be concrete, specific and practical, but don't be afraid to make them flexible and imaginative!

WARNING! It's Not Always Easy

Sitting through these meetings is not always easy; it's a good idea to keep them under an hour so you don't go crazy. Many parents have agreed that the Family Meeting is one of the most aggravating AND effective things you can do with your kids. It sounds contradictory, but if you can get through the process, the kids do have a greater tendency to follow through with the agreed-upon solutions. It's also nice that everyone has a chance to be heard and to learn some negotiation skills—an excellent preparation for marriage!



REMEMBER

Family meetings are effective and obnoxious. You will get a lot accomplished and teach your kids some valuable negotiating skills. But you'll also have to put up with a fair amount of aggravation when people interrupt one another or argue. Keep the meetings under one hour, be as patient as you can, and don't ever expect anyone to want to come!

QUICK TIP: Active Listening

You are a **good active listener** if, while your child is talking you are sincerely trying to understand what he is saying.

You are a **bad active listener** if, while you child is talking, you are preparing your rebuttal.

Be sure to check out our [Ask Dr. Phelan Tool](#) for more **QUICK TIPS** on common parenting challenges!