THE FAMILY MEETING

LIFE SKILL
communicating with others

Why hold family meetings?
Regular family meetings build time together into your busy lives. A family meeting provides time for families to listen and talk to each other; to make decisions, solve problems, and resolve conflicts together; to plan family fun; to schedule family duties and chores; and to share time as a family. This activity promotes family unity, teaches family members to communicate, and strengthens family bonds.

What do we need?
the family calendar; lists of school and activity dates; paper and pencils

How long will it take?
approximately 45 minutes a week

What do we do?
• Decide when and where to meet.
• Choose a chairperson and a secretary. A parent could be the chairperson the first time.
• Prepare an agenda. Some families prepare a list of subjects to discuss in the meeting by having members write what they would like to talk about on a sheet of paper. Other families wait until the meeting to bring up topics for discussion. The goal is not to start with agreement but to end with it. When conflict arises, strive to reach a solution that everyone feels good about.
Sample Meeting Agenda

1. Family members share their schedules for the week ahead. Solve any schedule conflicts and plan for transportation needs.
2. Share one thing that you appreciated about each family member this past week.
3. Solve a problem. Examples are toys being left out or parents being too strict.
4. Plan one fun activity to do as a family this week.
5. Set the day, time, and place for your next family meeting.
6. Share what you liked about having the meeting; then adjourn.

Option: Play a game together before or after the meeting.

Tips for Successful Family Meetings

- Review the listening skills you learned in previous activities.
- Review the ground rules from the “Listen and Learn” activity on page 39.
- Encourage all members of the family to talk and share ideas.
- Remember, young family members will need more time to share their ideas. Parents and older children should be patient.
- Only one person should speak at a time.
- Put-downs are not acceptable.
- Try to reach agreement on all decisions, plans, or solutions to problems. If you find you can’t do this within a reasonable amount of time, stop. Bring the issue up again at another meeting or when people have had more time to think about it.
- Describe the problem without blaming or accusing. Instead of saying, “You always leave the milk out,” say, “Suzie, the milk is out on the counter, and it spoils when it is left out.”
- Talk about how you feel about the problem. Instead of saying “You never let me do anything,” tell your parent how you feel when you are not allowed to go someplace with your friend. For example, say “I feel frustrated (or angry or disappointed) when I can’t go to the movie with my friends.”
- Always try to use the word “I”; using “I” shows that you own the statement. When you use the word “you,” people get defensive. To the listener, “you” means that you are blaming or accusing him of something. For example, a child could say to a parent, “You never let me do anything!” A better way to put that feeling into words would be, “I feel really angry because you wouldn’t let me go to the movie with Jenny.”
Avoid These Stumbling Blocks

• Don’t skip or cancel a meeting.
• Don’t turn a meeting into a gripe session.
• Don’t use put-downs.
• Don’t let one person dominate the meeting.
• Follow through on plans or decisions.
• Avoid preaching and scolding.

What happened?

▼ Who called the meeting?
▼ Who chaired the meeting?
▼ What was on the agenda?
▼ Did the meeting encourage cooperation in your family? How?

What did you learn?

▼ Why was it important to prepare an agenda?
▼ Why should you avoid put-downs?
▼ Did you see a difference when you used the word “I” instead of “you” to express your feelings about a problem?
▼ Did family members cooperate more?
▼ Did you have better feelings about your family members as a result of the meeting?
▼ Was it easier for you to remain calm in a group situation?

Why was this activity important?

▼ Were the feelings of some of your family members surprising?
▼ Were you able to make any important decisions?
▼ Were you able to solve any problems?

What’s next?

▼ Do you think people will behave differently because of discussions and decisions made at the meeting?
▼ Do you think you’ll see more cooperation among family members outside the meeting?
▼ Will you set up a regular time and place to have family meetings?
▼ What will you do differently at your next family meeting?