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Family Meetings

Finding Teamwork in the Middle of Caregiving

A Caregiver Resource by 2villages



What is a Family Meeting?

A Family Meeting is a short, regular time when your whole family sits down together to appreciate each other, solve problems, and plan the week ahead.

It is a core Positive Discipline tool, developed by Jane Nelsen from the work of Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs.

It is not a lecture, and it is not the place to list everything that went wrong this week. The goal is connection and shared problem-solving, where every person has a voice and every voice counts.

A Family Meeting can last 15 to 30 minutes. What matters most is that it happens regularly and that everyone leaves feeling heard.

Why It Matters

Children need to feel that they belong and that they matter. A Family Meeting gives them both, every week.

Family Meetings can:

- Give every child a voice, including children who communicate in different ways
- Build a sense of belonging and significance
- Teach problem-solving, listening, and taking turns
- Reduce power struggles, because children cooperate more with plans they helped make
- Move problems out of the heat of the moment and into a calm one
- Give siblings a fair place to be heard
- Make the week more predictable
- Practice executive functioning skills like planning, flexibility, and follow-through
- Lighten your load, because you are no longer solving everything alone

Having an Effective Family Meeting

Compliments and appreciations.
Each person shares one thing they appreciate about someone else. Always start here.

Check in on last week.
How did the solution we tried work? Keep it, adjust it, or try something new.

Solve one problem together.
Pick one item, brainstorm ideas without judging them, and choose one solution to try for a week.

Plan the week.
Look at appointments, activities, meals, and who is doing what.

End with something fun.
A game, a dessert, a dance party. End on connection.

A few things help it go well:

Schedule it.
Choose a regular day and time, and protect it the way you would any other appointment.

Keep a visible agenda.
Put a list where anyone can add a topic during the week. Any family member can add a problem.

Start small.
Your first few meetings can be compliments and something fun. Add problem-solving when ready.

Focus on solutions.
Ask "What would help?" instead of "Who did it?"

Share the jobs.
Let children take turns leading the meeting, writing or drawing the notes, or keeping time.

Making it Work for Your Family

A Family Meeting should fit your child, not the other way around. Adjusting is not lowering.

- Keep it short: 15 to 20 minutes is plenty, and for some children 5 to 10 is the right place to start.
- Begin with a regulation check-in by asking how everyone's body is feeling, because a snack, a stretch, or a few deep breaths can change the whole meeting.
- Welcome movement, since fidgets, drawing, standing, or sitting on the floor are all ways of participating.
- Offer more than one way to have a voice, such as pointing, picture cards, AAC, thumbs up or down, drawing, or writing an idea down ahead of time.
- Use a written or picture agenda so everyone can see what is happening now and what comes next.
- And let leaving be okay. A child who needs a break can step away and come back, because staying regulated matters more than staying seated.

A Note For Caregivers

Your first few meetings may feel awkward. Someone may refuse to come. Someone may leave halfway through. That does not mean it is not working.

Family Meetings are a skill your whole family is learning together, and skills grow through practice. Progress over perfection.

Try this week: Pick a day and time, gather for ten minutes, and do just two things: share one appreciation each, and choose one fun thing to do together.

You are not meant to do this alone, and that includes inside your own home.

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