

Holding a Family Meeting

The aim of the first meeting is to discuss and agree upon the "Ground Rules" for future meetings that will work for you as a family. Below are some suggestions to help you to have successful, constructive meetings:

Choose a good time of day: when everyone is not too tired/ stressed/ hungry. If possible try to develop a routine by sticking to approximately the same time each week.

Everyone needs to be present to encourage transparency and openness (unless too young to understand).

Take it in turns each week to "chair" the meeting, including the children. However, one parent must have the final say in maintaining order and mutual respect: decide who and make this clear to everyone.

Everyone has time to answer a particular question, including the choice to say that they have nothing that they want to say. Encourage everyone to participate - even if only to say this aloud!

Examples of Questions: How has your week been? / What's the best thing that happened this week? / How was it for everyone when **X** happened? / Has anything happened this past week that made you feel upset? (angry/ frustrated?) / Is there anything that anyone is worrying about? / What's happening next week that we all need to know about? / What meals would everyone like next week? Etc.

It is vital that people don't talk over each other or interrupt. However, if one person monopolises the time, someone needs to intervene by saying it's another person's turn to speak. It can help to use an object for the speaker to hold (& pass) if necessary.

Encourage everyone to use "I" statements when talking about how *they* feel about something.

Discourage blame and accusation, by encouraging people to concentrate on describing how they feel e.g. by using this helpful formula:

When you did (didn't do/said) **X**, **it made me feel** **Y**
So next time I'd be glad (it would be great) **if you could do** **Z?**

Try to keep to the meeting time agreed and not too long. 15-20 minutes is fine to start with and never more than 30 minutes or it risks becoming heavy and something everyone comes to dread.

Useful reminder: we feel what we *feel*, but we can also *think* and therefore be responsible for what we *say and do*. Feelings just bubble up: fear, rage and loss are physiological responses to the world, hard-wired in to help us survive. Feelings also provide essential information to help us realise what we need. If we use awareness of feelings to think clearly, they can help us to effectively decide what to DO - that is both OK for us and OK for others.

Above all, encourage everyone to really listen to each other and to be honest about how they feel without accusing anyone or getting personal or defensive. This will help family members learn to recognise that just because it may be uncomfortable to say or to hear something difficult, *we have not stopped loving one other*. We are all unique, experience the world differently, have a right to our feelings and also to express these to the people that matter.

Good luck!