

**FAMILY  
MEETINGS  
WITH  
TEENS**

**A Guide for Parents**



**FAMILY MEETING**  
**Sunday 4:00**

**Parentingthebigkids.com**

**This guide is for you if you want to:**

- **START Family meetings with your teens**
- **RE-START family meetings with your teens**
- **REJUVENATE Family meetings with your teens**

## **Sections:**

**How to Introduce the idea of family meetings and Engage your teen**

**Setting Family Meeting Rules**

**Suggestions for meeting Format and creating the Agenda**

**Sample format and agenda**

**Communication & Problem Solving Tips**

**FAQ's**

# How to Introduce & Engage

- Don't ask Your teen if they want to have family meetings. Present it as mandatory-a decision you have made.
- Ambivalence is OK. Maybe you have some too. Roll with it.: "It's OK to be unsure about this idea but we're giving it a try."
- If your teen asks WHY do we have to do this stupid family meeting thing (or some variation of that), be ready with a simple answer. Find your own or use this:"It's something we are going to try. We think it will help with communication during these years when we are all so busy"
- If your teen is not that into the meetings, that's ok. Go ahead and validate her feeling .. This can be as simple as: "I hear you. You'd rather not do this family meeting thing."
- Involve them in choosing the time for the meeting. We want to figure out a time that's best for everyone. What would work for you?"
- Emphasize the democratic nature of the meetings:: It 's NOT a chance for parents to lecture or nag. All voices are heard.
- Don't bribe, but try to make it a fun, positive atmosphere:: Favorite snacks? Vacation planning?

## Setting the Rules

- Make the rules at the first meeting, **together**. Write them down so that you have them at each meeting.
- Most teens have experience in collaborative rule making from school or in other groups. Let them take the lead if they are willing.
- Assign someone to be the writer. (rotate this job unless someone loves it.)
- Write down all rule ideas. Then go through them and cross off the ones that don't work. What's left are your family meeting rules.
- The written rules you have at each meeting can be helpful as a gentle reminder, "hey, remember we agreed, no personal attacks."

## Here are some sample rules (Suggestions):

- One person talks at a time
- Everyone gets a turn to talk
- It is okay to disagree
- Everyone's contributions are valued
- Speak to each other, not about each other
- Focus on solutions, not blame.

## Format & Agenda: Suggestions

- Have a **regular format** for the meeting. First this, then that. How does the meeting start? How does it end?
- You can find printable family meeting planners online if you want something formal, but they are not necessary, and many of them are more suited to younger kids. You can write your own format to suit your family.
- Length of meetings should be flexible. Set a minimum (20 minutes?) and a maximum (1 hour?) so your teen will not feel trapped and can plan around the meeting.
- How often do you have a meeting? Weekly is great, but with the busy lives of teens, every other week may be more realistic. Once a month works for some families.
- The meeting is NOT a time or place to scold, punish, recall past mistakes, blow off steam, or single out a particular person.
- An important part of the meeting is discussion/problem solving of concerns of family members. I suggest you require these concerns be stated (written) before the meeting starts to avoid a lot of casual complaints being

### How to gather issues for the agenda?

- A meeting whiteboard on the fridge?
- A meeting box with slips of paper nearby?
- A shared digital document all family members can access? out at meetings.

## Format & Agenda: Suggestions, Continued...

- "It is important to have a written agenda. In our family, we taped a blank sheet of paper to our refrigerator door, where family members wrote down the items they wanted to discuss, along with their names. This became the official agenda for the next meeting." (From [Awareparenting.com](http://Awareparenting.com))
- **Everyone** should bring issues to the meetings. To encourage your kids and teens, when you see or hear about an issue, try, "That sounds like a good one to add to the agenda."
- **Don't insist.** When you have a problem, add it to the agenda. Issues that are resolved before the meeting can be removed.
- **You will not be able to resolve all issues in one meeting.** Prioritize issues that have been brought up repeatedly, issues that affect more than one person, and issues that are time sensitive.
- **Remember: You are teaching problem solving and communication skills** that can last a lifetime. Be patient. Whenever something doesn't go well, you may want to stop and say, "We'll try again next time."
- Even in a family meeting, you're still the parent(s). At times you may need to step in to firmly and kindly declare an issue needs to be tabled for later or moved outside of the family meeting. Try not to do this often :)

# Sample Format & Agenda

Rotate meeting roles:



Leader

Writer

Time keeper

????

Take notes, as basic or detailed as you want. It will help keep track of plans and solutions & it will be fun to look back on!

1. **Opening:** Check in with each person sharing something about their past week (Or do compliments or recognitions or something else positive)
2. Any **Follow up** from last meeting
3. Any **Announcements** about upcoming happenings
4. Discuss **Issues/concerns** on agenda list: You will not be able to resolve all issues in one meeting. Prioritize issues that have been brought up repeatedly, issues that affect more than one person, and issues that are time sensitive. **Take one issue at a time.** Remember this is a FAMILY meeting, so if it is something very individual (a request from one child to go to a party) that may be better handled outside of the family meeting time.
5. Any follow up from #4 and who's responsible for what
6. Optional: Menu Planning and/or planning family activities
7. Closing: Something each person has coming up this week? Or just a quick summary or ?
8. When is the next meeting?

# Problem Solving Tips

**Take one issue at a time.;** Sometimes there is a common thread! Joey is upset that Cara takes his stuff without asking. Cara is upset that mom uses her art supplies without asking. The common issue could just be "asking to use people's things"

Help your kids and teens practice brainstorming. Together, think of all the possible solutions to solve whatever issue is at hand. During the brainstorming time all ideas are okay. Write down all suggestions. When brainstorming is finished, together choose one solution that everyone can agree with.

Positive discipline has a model for finding solutions that some families might find helpful: The 3R's and an H for Solutions: 1) Related, 2) Reasonable, 3) Respectful, and, 4) Helpful. When considering solutions, consider whether they meet these criteria.

The meeting is NOT a time or place to scold, punish, recall past mistakes, blow off steam, or single out a particular person.



## Communication Tips

**Use Open-ended questions often:** These are questions that can't be answered with one word (e.g. "What concerns you most?" "What would you like to be different?"). Open questions communicate more interest in your teen's viewpoint.

**Summarizing** communicates that you were listening, and helps pull together the important things that were said. It also helps your child to organize her thoughts more coherently. If you can tie them together in a logical way, and can lead her to connect certain dots. Summaries can even guide the conversation toward a next step, without forcing an agenda. Try to summarize as accurately as possible, without editing the conversation to include what you wished she had said.

### Communication traps:

**The blaming trap:** who is at fault or who is to blame? This trap shuts down a conversation and backs your teen into a corner.

**The Taking-Sides Trap:** If you take only one side of a discussion, it's practically a set up for your child to take the other. Instead of one side against the other you can be on the same side, the side of constructive conversation, considering different options together.

# Problem Solving FAQ's

**Q: What if my teen refuses to attend meetings?**

If you have other kids, go ahead and have the meetings. Stay positive with the refusing to attend teen. **DO NOT** yell or argue. Be Firm and Kind: "We expect and want you at the meetings". Do not give permission for other plans at family meeting time. If Your teen is the only child, it is more complicated. It might work to negotiate a bit on time a format to motivate them to participate. "What would be a good time for you?"

**Q: What if my teen comes but doesn't participate?**

Thank him for coming. He may need to see that it is a safe and democratic space before he commits? As long as he is not being disruptive, encourage and stay positive. "I'm glad you're here. When you're ready, we'd love to hear what you think about X or Y."

**Q: What about changing or canceling meetings?**

Try to avoid doing this. If a set time is hard to stick with, just schedule the next meeting at the end of each meeting, with calendars handy! This can be part of the rule making process. Meetings can only be missed for . \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q: Do meetings need to be weekly?**

Weekly meetings are ideal. But meetings should not feel like a huge burden (although they should feel like an important commitment!) Every other week can work well. Figure out what is best for your family but never less than monthly.

**Q: What if the meeting gets out of hand? (arguing, bad behavior, etc.)**

Model good communication skills to guide it back to the agenda & rules. If it's really out of control, it's ok to end the meeting calmly, "we'll try again next week."

**Q: Are there any family situations that are not right for family meetings?**

Yes. If there is any type of abuse, people can not feel safe in a family meeting. This includes physical, emotional or verbal abuse. That issue needs to be addressed immediately with the help of a therapist or, in extreme situations, authorities. Also if the family situation is very chaotic and troubled, family counseling and other supports may need to come first.

**Q: My teen is out of control. How can I force him to attend?**

No one can or should be **forced** into family meetings. If a teen is truly "out of control", family meetings are not the priority. Safety is the first priority and restoring your connection with your teen is the second priority. Family meetings can be very helpful to you once things are more stable. In these situations, the guidance of a therapist or parent coach is recommended.