

Family meetings: Things to remember

The family meeting is a gathering of family members. It's a time to improve family communication, help the family work together, and solve problems together. It is also a time to have fun!

How to start your family meetings

1. **Pick a time and place:** Talk with all family members about the best time and place for the meeting. Many families choose the beginning of the week (e.g., Sunday or Monday) so they can plan for the whole week. Once you agree on a time, try to stick to it every week.

Decide how long you will meet for, and try to end the meeting on time. If your family has young children, try to keep the meeting short (less than 30 minutes).

Choose a place for your meeting. One of the best places is the kitchen or dining room table.

2. **Invite all family members:** All members of the household who think of themselves as a family should attend the family meetings. Some family members may choose not to attend. Even if only two family members want to meet, you should hold the meeting. The others may change their minds once they see the advantages of the meeting.
3. **Agree on some guidelines:** Some families find it helpful to set up guidelines for family meetings. For example, you may agree to the following:
 - Only one person may talk at a time.
 - Everyone gets a chance to talk.
 - It is important to listen while another person is talking.
 - One must make no judgments about another's opinion.

Your family should choose its own guidelines at the start of the first meeting. The family should also talk about whether you want to have a chairperson and a secretary. If all agree, then take turns at these tasks.

The chairperson starts the meeting, introduces each new section of the meeting and calls on family members to speak. He or she makes sure that each person's opinion is heard.

FAMILY MEETING: THINGS TO REMEMBER (CONTINUED)

The secretary takes notes on any plans or decisions that are made. The notes help to remind family members about decisions. Without notes, it is sometimes hard to remember to act on what was decided.

4. **Decide what you want to talk about:** Here are some ideas to get you started.
- **Compliments or “good things”:** Each family member talks about the good things others in the family have done in the past week. This could be thanking someone for their help, mentioning special talents or recognizing new skills. Starting the meeting with compliments helps to create a positive atmosphere.
 - **Notes (optional):** The secretary reads the notes from the last meeting.
 - **Time management and schedules:** Each person talks about their plan for the week and how other family members can help. For example, a parent may have to work on Tuesday evening, and a child has soccer practice after school on that day. By planning ahead, you can arrange for someone else to take the child to soccer practice. Sharing what each other is doing helps the week run smoothly.
 - **What’s going on in each person’s life:** Examples include work, school, looking for work or arranging family support.
 - **Family education:** Some families use the family meeting to talk about family values and to promote family education. For example, one family member volunteers to find out about a certain topic that he or she is interested in. Topics could include health, finances, work or education.
 - **Responsibilities:** Review how well the family has done at its tasks for the week. You can decide together if changes are needed or if it is time for a reward.
 - **Issues and solutions:** This is a chance to talk about concerns and to identify some solutions together.
 - **Family treat:** A family game or activity, singing a song or sharing a dessert helps to end the meeting on a positive note, and gets the week off to a fun start.