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# CELEBRATE YOUR FAMILY

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***“Celebrate Your Family” is intended to help your family develop its strengths. The only two requirements for celebrating your family are a desire to do something that will strengthen the family further, and a family commitment to set aside some time for strength-building activities.***

Families live in a rapidly changing world. In the last few years tremendous changes have occurred that affect families and how families live. Think for a moment about the rise of fast-food restaurants, pay television, home computers, and video arcades. Consider how changes in transportation, industry, the economy, unemployment, job specialization, or government have affected your family.

Many families have less time available for family members to get together and talk with each other about their individual concerns or family matters.

In today's busy world, strong families take very definite steps to plan time to be together – to talk about their ideas and concerns, resolve problems, and plan family activities.

## Let's plan a weekly family meeting.

A family meeting is a time when the entire family gets together to:

- Make plans
- Share ideas
- Solve problems
- Resolve conflicts
- Make decisions

The family meeting should give every member of the family an opportunity to participate, share ideas, and have a part in the decisions that affect the family and its members. Individual members are always more willing to accept or follow a decision or rule if they had a voice in making it. This is especially true of children. Children who share their ideas and make suggestions in a family meeting see themselves as important members and develop a commitment and

sense of loyalty to each other and to the family. They also learn to work together cooperatively on common problems.

Find a “best” time, a time when all the members can be together, are fairly free from outside pressures, and are able to share their ideas. One family may meet after dinner one night a week while another family may choose a Sunday morning. Once the time is selected, make the meeting an important, regular event. Don't let outside activities interfere with the meeting.

Choose a place. Every member should be comfortable and able to see all the others. Most families meet at the kitchen or dinner table.

Allow enough time at each meeting so members won't feel hurried. The time may vary from family to family and from one meeting to the next depending on what is being discussed. When young children are involved, it is important to remember their attention span is shorter than that of adults.

There is no set agenda or list of items to deal with that every family follows. The agenda might include items like upcoming family events or planning activities, problems that need to be discussed and solved, ideas about something the family plans to purchase, or even idea sharing about next week's menu. The agenda might even include giving the children their allowances. If facts are needed about some topic, one member may be appointed to gather the facts and report back to the family at the next meeting. In the case of a family with younger children, the parent should decide initially, at least, what the family will deal with during the meeting.

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Almost anytime when several ideas are presented, there will be conflicting opinions. Conflict should be expected. The goal should not be to start with agreement but to end with it. Differing ideas can help the family arrive at the best solution or decision. When there is a difference, agreement can be reached. The group should find a solution that everyone feels good about. Try to avoid having one person make the decision or taking a vote, as these tend to divide the family. Encourage one or more members to compromise, to give in a little or modify an idea so that it is more acceptable to all.

### Further suggestions.

A preschooler can be responsible for beginning the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

A family might play a game together immediately before or after the meeting.

A song might be used to open or close the meeting.

### Tips for successful family meetings.

- Encourage each member to talk and share ideas.
- Be patient with younger children. They need more time to tell their ideas.
- Insist that only one person talk at a time. Make certain everyone else listens with ears and hearts, in order to get the real meaning.
- Encourage all to keep an open mind when something is being discussed.
- Meet regularly, once a week.
- Share the responsibility. Ask for a volunteer or assign a member to gather facts or run part of the meeting.
- Be respectful of each idea presented, regardless of what it is.
- Strongly encourage every family member to participate.
- Try to reach a consensus of opinion on all decisions, plans, or solutions to problems.

### Roadblocks to successful family meetings.

- Skipping or cancelling a meeting.
- Turning the meeting into a gripe session.
- Making another person feel put down (laughed at, ridiculed).
- Allowing one member, child or parent, to dominate.
- Failing to follow through on plans or decisions.
- Preaching, scolding, or lecturing.

By James E. Van Horn, Extension Specialist, Family Sociology,  
The Pennsylvania State University.



### The weekly family meeting:

- Promotes family unity, a feeling of being part of the team.
- Gives each person a feeling of importance and belonging.
- Makes all family members, not just a single person, responsible for decisions.
- Teaches family members how to communicate.
- Helps children learn how to make decisions.
- Promotes cooperation on family concerns.
- Strengthens the family.

**For the family that is busy and wants to develop unity, the weekly family meeting is a great help. It enables the family to cope with the stresses that are present in day-to-day living. The family meeting has great possibilities.**

**A weekly meeting requires time, planning, effort, and commitment on the part of every member of the family. The weekly family meeting will establish in the eyes and minds of all the members the importance of their family.**

**Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service**

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