

THE FAMILY MEETING NOTEBOOK

“Empowering Families for Successful Living”

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developingcapablementors.com

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Introduction

We stand convinced that the family is not only the cornerstone of society, but also the primary educational setting for the development of the perceptions and skills necessary to equip individuals for the challenges of life. With this in mind we have made a commitment to “Empower Families for Successful Living.”

Changes in, and challenges for, the family have increased greatly over the last two generations. Many would say that society has put the traditional family under much stress and perhaps, destined its ultimate demise. Recently, in a conference, we heard a speaker say that the family has moved from first place in influence in individuals’ lives to some lesser position of influence behind things like the media and peers. We strongly believe that the family in which we spend our formative years still far outweighs other influences.

It is in the family, during the formative years (which may include from birth to ?), that our initial perceptions and skills become a part of who we are. True, the family may or may not be as effective as in generations past in imparting “healthy” perceptions and skills, but the influence is still there as strong as ever and may be good or not so good.

In our fast-paced world, many family traditions and rituals have diminished or disappeared completely. With the advent of radio, television, computers and cell phones, the biggest loss of all may be family dialogue – not just talking at, to, or for each other, but rather, *with* each other.

Dialogue – Its Definition and Importance

Dialogue is not just talking and listening. Meaningful dialogue happens when people feel they can share their perceptions freely in an environment without hesitation or the fear of being judged or ridiculed. Only in this kind of environment can we hope to build closeness and trust so vital to cohesiveness. Today, the family desperately needs to provide that environment. Some do, many do not.

It might be prudent at this point to state that “family” does not imply any particular number of adults and/or children. The family meeting we propose works with two-parent families, single-parent families, families with no children or families with children of various ages.

An offering – not a guarantee

We do not propose to convince you that this is *the* way families must operate. We only offer this notebook and its suggestions as *a* way which has often provided a structure that has helped families grow together and maintain some cohesiveness along the way. Even the structure offered here may not be what works for you. Take a look, give it a try if you choose, keep what you like and discard what you don't.

We only wish to share with you our experience and insights as we have worked with families over the years. We wish for you the faith, hope and love that we believe was intended to be the foundation on which the first institution – the family – was founded.

Family Meetings

In today's busy lifestyle of appointments, ball games, concerts, various sorts of lessons and/or practices, work, school and yes, even television time, we believe that the best opportunity to return dialogue to families is through the practice of family meetings. We also believe there are three perceptions and three skills – “The Essential ½ Dozen” – which are necessary for individuals and families to effectively deal with life. Research is plain that the three perceptions of seeing one's self as capable, as influential and as significant, are essential in building confidence, healthy self-esteem and resiliency (the ability to bounce back). Intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills and responsible decision-making skills are best cultivated and developed through practice.

The manner in which the family interacts in family meetings through an environment of openness, closeness, trust and non-judgment, helps instill in each individual the perceptions listed above. The family meeting also provides the practice field for the development of the essential skills. We often refer to family meetings as the “laboratory” for the development of the Essential ½ Dozen.

Some ground rules help provide the environment so necessary to conduct effective and productive family meetings:

- The family meeting is not just a time for parents to inflict their agenda upon the family, but rather an opportunity for all family members to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment or ridicule.
- It should also be stated that although consensus is the goal, the family meeting is not a democracy. Though parents may at times “give in” or negotiate on some issues, limits or boundaries, they should not, nor do we encourage them to, agree to decisions, solutions, or practices that clearly are not in the best interests of physical, emotional or psychological health of all concerned.
- The focus should be on solutions, not just consequences.
- Family meetings are not just for problem-solving. If so, they just become organized gripe sessions. Meetings serve as a forum for discussing anything relating to the family – schedules, vacations, family outings, etc.

- It seems to work best when the family sets a regular time for the meeting – the same day of the week, the same time of the day, and a set length of time. One hour is probably sufficient. If young children are participants, 20-30 minutes might be more appropriate.
- Place is important. Comfort is important; however, too relaxed affects focus. If the meeting is around the table (a good place), the table should be clear of distractions. Only this notebook and pencil or pen are needed.
- There should be no interruptions. The televisions, radios and cell phones are off, the home phone is unplugged (or answered by a machine *in another room*), and visitors are discouraged. If a family member cannot attend, the family may choose to reschedule or allow that person to miss the meeting. However, the member who misses lives by the decisions made in the meeting.

Suggested Family Meeting Structure

The Agenda

The agenda is nothing more than the items for discussion during the family meeting. You will see that the first form in this notebook is the “FAMILY MEETING Agenda Page.”

This page needs to be accessible at all times. The notebook may have a special place on a coffee table, end table or bookcase shelf. The page may even be removed from the notebook and placed on the refrigerator door.

If someone has a topic he/she would like to have discussed at the next family meeting, the person simply adds it to the bottom of the list, with their name or initials (date is optional).

Incidentally, the agenda often serves as an opportunity for a “cooling off” time. When an issue requiring cool heads and discussion surfaces which could be potentially controversial and/or explosive, it can often be dealt with by the phrase, “Put it on the agenda.” This often brings surprising results in dealing with immediate stressors.

The Chairperson

The chairperson calls the meeting to order, monitors the meeting format and watches the time. The first time or two, it is best if an adult chairs the meeting. Later, this position may be rotated allowing all to have a turn. Remember, this is not the person *in charge*, but merely the meeting facilitator.

The Recorder

It is very important that minutes be kept of each meeting. The “FAMILY MEETING Minutes Page” has been supplied for this purpose. Again, this is a responsibility which may be shared on a rotating basis.

The Meeting Format

The chairperson may use a blank copy of the “FAMILY MEETING Minutes Page” as an outline for chairing the meeting. The items marked with an asterisk (*) make up the order of business. The chairperson calls the meeting to order and the recorder fills in the top of the minutes page. The chairperson may want the recorder to announce the beginning time and ending time for everyone’s information.

Compliments, Appreciations, Celebrations, Congratulations

The chairperson then opens the meeting for compliments, appreciations, celebrations and congratulations. This sharing gives each person the opportunity to be affirmed and can be done in many ways. Family members may decide to share about all other members present, the person sitting next to them, or randomly. It is important that all family members share and all are affirmed.

Discussing Agenda Items

The chairperson then presents the first item on the agenda for discussion. Items should be taken on a first-come-first-served basis unless the family agrees by consensus to change the order. When the agenda item is read, the person who put the item on the agenda should be allowed to speak first about the item. There may be times when the person feels the item is no longer an issue and can be deleted to move on.

Discussion then follows, allowing each family member who wishes to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas about the item. If appropriate, the next thing is to seek a solution, answer or consensus about this item. Space has been provided on the “FAMILY MEETING Brainstorming/Dialogue Notes Page” for brainstorming. It is important that everyone’s ideas are considered equally. Then, by process of elimination and negotiation, a solution is reached by consensus. It is important that all members of the family agree with the decision. If no consensus can be reached, an item can remain on the agenda for the next meeting.

If appropriate for an item, the same procedure can be used to decide on logical consequences if a family member chooses not to adhere to the agreed upon decision.

Decisions and consequences are then “in effect” until they appear and are changed in a subsequent family meeting.

Clarification, Recording and Proceeding

At this point, it might be well for each family member to state his/her understanding of the decision and the related consequences. If clarification is needed, this is the time to do it.

Decisions and consequences may then be transferred to the “FAMILY MEETING Decisions/Consequences Page.” (Record the Decisions/Consequences page number on the Minutes Page for easier reference.) This item may then be scratched from the Agenda Page.

The chairperson then proceeds to the next item on the agenda for discussion.

Reviewing the Family Calendar

When time is not sufficient to address another agenda item, many families find it effective to review the family calendar for the next week or so. Not only can many problems be solved before they arise, but this activity is an excellent way to learn and practice planning and time management. The family may want to address as an agenda item what to do about things which “pop up” unexpectedly and were not on the family calendar.

Family Activity

Closing the family meeting with some family activity is often an effective way to further enhance family cohesiveness. The activity is limited only by the imagination of the family members. It might be enjoying a dessert, a game, an outing or a devotional. This activity often becomes the highlight of the evening for the entire family.

Some Closing Thoughts

Change is almost always difficult. Change is unpredictable. Today may not be good, but if there is no change, at least tomorrow is predictable. However, to become more effective, change is inevitable.

Families who have started family meetings often say it is difficult at first. But with persistence these meetings become a powerful family ritual and tradition. The benefits are far-reaching. The preventive aspects of family meetings can spare us heartbreak and give us hope.

Helpful Hint

We recommend that you print this entire notebook, three-hole punch it and put it in a binder. After printing, make multiple copies of the forms (pages 10-13).

We hope you find these ideas and suggestions helpful. Please feel free to share your comments, suggestions, questions and successes with us. You may email us at info@developingcapablementors.com.

Phyl and Deborah Brinkley have over 50 years of combined experience working with families and are dedicated to “Empowering Families for Successful Living.”

As educators, trainers and public speakers, they are committed to developing mentors who then create environments where “The Essential ½ Dozen” may be taught, caught and nurtured.

For additional information visit their website at: developingcapablementors.com.

FAMILY MEETING Minutes Page

Date: _____ Beginning Time: _____ Ending Time: _____
Chaired by: _____ Recorder: _____

*** Sharing:** (Compliments, Appreciations, Celebrations, Congratulations)

*** Agenda Item:** _____ Pg: ____ No: ____

Brainstorming: (On Brainstorming Page)

Decision: _____

Consequences: _____

*** Agenda Item:** _____ Pg: ____ No: ____

Brainstorming: (On Brainstorming Page)

Decision: _____

Consequences: _____

*** Agenda Item:** _____ Pg: ____ No: ____

Brainstorming: (On Brainstorming Page)

Decision: _____

Consequences: _____

*** Review decisions and consequences for understanding.**

*** Transfer decisions/consequences to Decisions/Consequences Page.**

*** Delete agenda items with decisions from Agenda Page.**

*** Review family calendar.**

*** Family activity:** _____

*** Next meeting date:** _____ **Time:** _____

FAMILY MEETING Decisions/Consequences Page

Page No: _____

Date	Decisions/Consequences	Change Date
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____
6. _____	_____	_____
7. _____	_____	_____
8. _____	_____	_____
9. _____	_____	_____
10. _____	_____	_____
11. _____	_____	_____
12. _____	_____	_____
13. _____	_____	_____
14. _____	_____	_____
15. _____	_____	_____
16. _____	_____	_____
17. _____	_____	_____
18. _____	_____	_____
19. _____	_____	_____
20. _____	_____	_____