

The Family Meeting Practice

Experiential Exercise Suggestions

After introducing the values of family meetings, reviewing and explaining the basic steps it's important to give participants an opportunity to practice in class and to discuss their experience and observations. Here are some ways to structure practice sessions:

Practice involving the entire group:

1. Set up chairs in an open space in the room.
- Ask for four or five volunteers to role-play a family meeting. For practice, four or five “family members” works best, but three can work as well. The volunteers get to choose who will be the parent(s) and the ages and genders of the children.
- Select topics:

Suggest several positive topics for first practice session:

2. The parent has found a little extra money that the family can spend for a special treat – a movie, eating out, etc. The family gets together to decide what to do that everyone can enjoy together
 - Favorite Aunt or Uncle is coming to visit.
 - Someone in the family is having a birthday
 - A child has made a lot of progress in improving grades in school

Second practice session can focus on topics that are considered more of a “problem” (something that has potential for family conflict.):

2. Family chores
 3. Sharing the bathroom in the morning so everyone can get to school and work on time
 4. Shall we get a dog?
 5. Bed time for children of different ages.
- Each person in the role-play gets to choose a mentor who will sit behind or near the “family member”. The mentor will not participate actively in the family meeting but will refer to the handouts and guidelines and quietly give suggestions to the family member she’s “mentoring”. This process actively involves as many class members as possible.
 - All of the remaining class members are asked to make notes on the progress of the meeting, also referring to the handouts and guidelines. Remind them to make helpful suggestions. The intent here is to support and learn, not to find fault with the group members making their best effort.

- Were the guidelines followed?
- Were appreciations offered?
- Was the meeting kept on a positive note?
- Did the group try brainstorming possible solutions rather than going for quick, imposed resolutions of problems?
- Were the decisions RESPECTFUL, REASONABLE AND RELATED?
- Other observations.

6. Be sure to start with appreciations. This sets a positive tone for the meeting as well as teaching family members to notice and say “thank you!” for the positive actions of others. It helps to establish positive rather than fault-finding attitudes when addressing family issues.

7. Role-play the family meeting, going through the steps on the accompanying list. Work for 15 or 20 minutes, trying to find a resolution to at least one problem from the agenda.

8. Debrief, asking each family member individually about his/her experience, then ask each “mentor”, and then review the observations of the remainder of the group.

9. Repeat practice session with participants taking different roles if time allows.

Follow-up practice sessions

1. Practice without mentors: Follow steps above, but omit the roles of “mentors”. Ask observers to take notes as above.

- Practice first with a fictional family situation
- Group may wish to practice as a problem solving strategy for one of the participant’s actual family situation.
- Debrief as in “A” above.

2. When participants have practiced the family meeting in the whole group, they may break up in small groups so that each class member has the experience of participating as a family member.

3. Some groups have decided to use the “family meeting” format to have class problem solving meetings to decide about refreshments, courtesy in class, agreeing upon special training topics to be included in the agenda, etc.

Resources: “*The Real Family Meeting*” video and worksheets can be ordered from Conflict Management Consultants, Inc. 1-888-649-3040. *Positive Discipline for Parenting in Recovery* Nelsen, Intner & Lot, Ch. 7, “Learn Healthy Communication Skills: