

Family Morning Meetings

What is a Family Morning Meeting?

Some of us might already be familiar with the concept of family meetings, which are meetings where families come together to discuss an issue or problem, prevent conflicts, or make important decisions. But for others it might seem unusual to set aside specific time to talk as a family. Under normal circumstances, life moves quickly and families are often pulled apart by hectic work schedules, schoolwork, and after school activities. With the global pandemic changing everyone's definition of "normal life", there are many benefits to being more intentional about coming together as a family to talk, plan, and connect. Family Morning Meetings are a slightly different version of a traditional family meeting, and are a time for sharing, planning, bonding, and having fun!

What are the benefits of Family Morning Meetings?

Meetings that include and validate the voices and opinions of all members of a group create a positive and nurturing environment where conflicts can be resolved peacefully and individuals feel a sense of belonging and trust. Hosting a family morning meeting allows kids to feel heard, see the family as a cohesive group, build their self-esteem, learn skills to help them relate respectfully with those around them, develop empathy and tolerance towards others, create a safe space to discuss vulnerable topics, and ultimately bring families closer together.

Norms of Family Morning Meetings

If you are going to meet more regularly as a family, it is important to create some simple, respectful guidelines or "norms" that everyone agrees to follow. As the adult, your role is to be a supportive, nonjudgmental facilitator. Think of this time together as a special time to listen to your child (ren), learn about how they think and feel, organize your day together, and have some fun while you're at it. Here are some sample norms to help your meetings run smoothly:

- Listen with an open mind and an open heart
- No interruptions (maybe consider using a talking piece)
- Be positive and respectful towards others
- Make sure everyone has a chance to share
- Have fun with new experiences

What are the components to a Family Morning Meeting?

There are many ways to set up your family morning meeting, but regardless of which parts you include, aim for about 15 minutes per meeting. Try to choose parts that work best for your family then stick to that format to help create routine, predictability, and calm. Here are the main components of a family morning meeting:

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1. **Mindfulness or Breathing Activity**—Create a positive and calm meeting atmosphere to get the most out of your time together by starting with a 1-2 minute mindfulness / breathing activity. This will allow everyone to be present, focused, and ready to share. Try leading one of these [mindfulness activities](#) yourself, or go online and try a guided activity, such as [Mindful Moments](#).
2. **Sharing**—Read an [inspirational quote](#) and discuss, do a quick [check-in circle](#), or have kids share from a list of these [conversation starters](#). Whoever is leading the meeting should go first to model. Encourage respectful and active listening—that is, listening to understand instead of simply waiting for your turn to talk. If kids are hesitant or unsure what to say, try “Say more about that”, “Can you tell us why you think that?” or “Tell us more so we can understand your thinking.” Refrain from giving feedback or correcting, the purpose of sharing is to give your child an opportunity for their voice to be heard, for you to learn more about how your kids think / feel, and for you to model for them how to communicate in a healthy way.
3. (Optional / as needed) **Items for Discussion / Conflict Resolution**—Any pressing issues or conflicts can be discussed, making sure all attendees have a chance to share their thoughts and suggestions for how to come to a peaceful resolution / decision. Sometimes it is helpful to take notes on what is being said, and come up with an action plan together for how the family wants to proceed with the situation. Your action plan can include who will do what and when. To aid with communication, try using [“I Statements”](#) to help kids say how they feel without placing blame onto others. It’s also a good idea to revisit the conversation to follow up and reassess the solution.
4. **Plan Out Your Day**—Use this time to create a vision and plan for your day. When we think carefully about how we want and need to spend our time, it helps us be more productive, set and reach goals, manage our time, and feel a sense of accomplishment as we complete items on our list. It also helps kids predict what is coming next, which eases anxiety and stress. Daily schedules promote responsibility and good decision making skills, and best of all free up time for self or family activities. *Pro-tips: Start with the least favorite / most difficult activities, break big tasks into smaller pieces, and plan strategies to persevere (take deep breaths, solve the problem another way, use all available resources, ask for help, take a quick break). Print out a copy for each person using one of these [templates](#) or create your own schedule.
5. **Closing Activity**—End your meeting with a quick and interactive activity / game. Have a dance party to an upbeat song, play Rock-Paper-Scissors, create a secret handshake, make up a family cheer, play 20 Questions, or choose a no-equipment-needed [game](#). Be creative and leave on a positive note! The last few minutes of your meeting will determine the tone for the day, so have fun!

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Tips for Successful Family Morning Meetings

Some added suggestions to make your meetings go over really well:

- Serve refreshments
- Give attendees choices or take turns with who picks the mindfulness / game / refreshments
- Keep a positive tone
- Thank everyone for participating and being a valued member of your family