

## Family Meetings: A Key to Conflict Resolution

### Some Do's

1. Schedule them regularly, so there is some predictability. Otherwise the children will not trust the process.
2. Schedule them at the most convenient time for all members of the family.
3. Make the agenda available to everyone (having a piece of paper posted where everyone can see it to write items on helps considerably; otherwise children forget what they want to discuss).
4. Include agenda items that involve family plans, family fun events, family service opportunities; don't limit the agenda to problems and conflicts only.
5. Combine the family meeting with things that "taste good" (e.g., a special dessert, a family game or fun night, a trip to the ice cream store).
6. Rotate leadership so that children get a chance to develop their leadership skills.
7. Be sure that decisions are clear, tasks are assigned, consequences are identified when necessary, and that a "check-in" time has been identified (i.e., a time to evaluate how well a particular solution is working).
8. Give everyone a chance to speak; help less verbal members of the family get their points across.
9. Whenever possible, consider the children's agenda items early in the meeting, so that they experience the process working for them.

### Some Don't's

1. Don't try to cover every item on a large agenda if some family member(s) are having a hard time staying with the process; consider continuing the meeting the next evening.
2. Don't vote on possible solutions; try to come to a consensus. If that isn't possible at the time, carry the item over to the next meeting. Sometimes it works to ask a lone "hold-out" on a decision if they would be willing to go along with what the others propose for a limited amount of time and then evaluate it.
3. Don't always settle on the first solution proposed; brainstorm alternatives before deciding on one.
4. As adults, don't always be the first to speak to an item and don't criticize brainstormed possibilities or the language the children use unless it is hurtful to others; strong feelings need to be expressed.

### For Family Discussion

1. What would be the major obstacle in our family to having family meetings?
2. What are some strategies for overcoming that obstacle?

JAMES R. DAVID, Ph.D.  
14220 BRADSHAW DRIVE  
SILVER SPRING, MD 20905  
TEL: (301) 989-9155