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Family Meetings

*the Positive
Discipline way...*



A guide for parents

Family Meetings *the Positive Discipline way...*

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Concept taken from *Positive Discipline* by Dr. Jane Nelsen

Hey there!!

I'm Casey. For the past 14 years I have been imperfectly parenting my kids with Positive Discipline, while also facilitating others in bringing the work into their homes as well. It is messy!



Family Meetings have been a tool that has brought connection and a sense of contribution to our home.

When we are using them consistency, it is the glue that keeps all of the other bits together. **My hope with this guide is to support parents with teenagers on how to use the practice in a way that bring more peace and collaboration into their family space.**

Reach out to me if you have any questions or feedback at casey@joyfulecourage.com.

The mindset of Positive Discipline

Positive Discipline is a parenting philosophy that was brought to life by Dr. Jane Nelsen. The work is based on Alfred Adler's theory that *human behavior is motivated by our perceptions of and desire for a sense of belonging and significance*. This is a radically different approach to parenting from the behaviorist model of rewards and punishment.

As you move through this guide keep in mind that the purpose of Family Meetings, from the lens of PD, is to *create a space of belonging and significance*. This is created through offering compliments and appreciations, joint problem solving, co-creative collaboration, mutual respect and giving everyone in the family a voice.

The following pages will guide you through all of the pieces to think about for holding successful, sustainable family meetings - enjoy!



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Family Meetings are a cornerstone of the Positive Discipline home. They are a place for relationship building, life skill development and problem solving. The more you can stay on track with weekly meetings, the smoother the rest of the week will go.

That being said, **being rigid with the structure is never helpful.** Feel into the routine of Family Meetings and make them work for your family. You may get off track, just know that Family Meetings are *always* something that you can return to and start again.

The flow of starting a family meeting is important. You get to train your family in the routine of it and offer opportunities to practice. You get to invite them to join you in this process. Here is a structure you can play with:

Week 1 and 2:

Teach/practice compliments and planning something fun

** some families who are finding that trust/relationship is being rebuilt could stay here for longer than 2 weeks*

Week 3 and 4:

Continue to practice compliments and planning something fun

Introduce the agenda and problem solving

Invite only TEENS to bring problems to solve

Week 5 and 6:

Continue to practice compliments and planning something fun

Continue to practicing problem solving

Invite teens AND PARENTS to bring problems to solve

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Things to Consider When Planning Family Meetings:

There are many ways to hold a Family Meeting. I have found that following the guidelines laid out in the Positive Discipline program to be the most effective in our home. Here is a bit of content to get you on your way, with special considerations for families with teenagers.

Timing:

The first thing you need to do to create your family meeting routine is to pick the DAY and TIME that works for your family. It is important to consider everyone's activities, work schedules and the general flow of your home.

We held our family meetings after dinner on Sundays, this time worked for us for a long time and launched us into the beginning of our week. Some families hold their Family Meetings after breakfast or in the middle of the day. **You are the expert on your family and know what time/place will work best for them** - or better yet, ask them to help you decide!

Also, if you notice that it is difficult to bring everyone in the family together during the day and time you picked, change it! This is an ongoing process and it's okay to experiment :)

Family Meetings are most encouraging and powerful when everyone around the table actually wants to be there.

Tips for Buy in:

What to bring:

A friendly/encouraging attitude * A tone of authentic curiosity * Lightness

When teens feel safe, heard, and taken seriously, they are much more likely to want to participate in this process. As soon as they begin to feel attacked and discouraged, you will notice them withdraw or sabotaging the meeting. When you find your family in this space, it's time to take a break or end the meeting.

Your teens will let you know when they are done, and rarely will meetings last longer than 20 minutes. Play with this and set a time that is right for your family. If there are problems that don't get a chance to be heard, they rise to the top of the list for next week's meeting.



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Roles and Jobs

Depending on your teens, the roles/jobs they have during a Family Meeting can be an area of contentment or frustration. Teens will vary in their desire to "have a job" during the family meeting. Roles to offer up may include timekeeper, recorder, leader, helpful not hurtful monitor (the person who makes sure that the family is looking for solutions, not blame).

There are no rules here. Make it work for your family. Play with it and see what feels good and encouraging.

Compliment Circles

During week one of your new Family Meeting routine, you will be teaching, modeling and practicing giving and receiving compliments. We start with this because it is a part of **setting a tone of connection**. In some families, this is really easy and feels natural, in other families it can feel awkward or uncomfortable - it is all ok. Begin this practice and you will find that it gets easier.

It is absolutely true that your teens may NOT be into this. Don't get discouraged. Make light of how "weird" it might feel and encourage them to do it anyways. It will be important for you to maintain a positive attitude, especially if you are feeling pushback from your teen. Take care of you and remember that a lot of the mischief that may be coming up is simply an indicator that your teen feels uncomfortable with this new routine.

Talk about what a "backhanded compliment" is, and model what it looks and sounds like to give a *genuine* compliment to someone else in the family. We also will swap our compliments with what we appreciate. **It is a-ok to be flexible with what this looks like based on your families needs.**

Here is a structure you can follow:

The person giving the compliment says:
"_____, I would like to give you a compliment for _____."
Compliment receiver says: "Thank you, _____."



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Plan Something Fun

As our teens get older and busier, it can feel challenging to connect with them in fun and meaningful ways. **This part of the Family Meeting builds in the expectation that you will be spending time together as a family.**

This may be something that you do after the meeting or during the upcoming week. The idea here is that, as a family, you are deciding when, where and what you will be doing together.

You can tweak this and make it work for your family. It could be as simple as a family movie or game night, or getting out of the house and out into the world together. Make this the way you close every Family Meeting from the very start!

Introducing the Agenda and Problem Solving

Share the structure of family meetings with your family (see the sample agenda shared at the end of this guide). This is when you will introduce problem solving.

Our family has used a three ring binder with a picture of our family on the front in the past, lately it has been a clipboard in the family living space. Over the years I have created an outline (agenda) that I print out to guide whoever is leading the meeting (I have control issues). This is also something that has evolved and continues to evolve with our family over time.

No matter what your Family Meeting book looks like, it should have a place for people to write down problems they would like help solving. As you begin to practice problem solving during the Family Meeting, you all will be looking for *solutions* to problems.

Family Meeting Motto:
We are here to be HELPFUL, not HURTFUL



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Joint Problem Solving

Problem solving is really where most parents are hoping to get to with Family Meetings. It is important to keep in mind, ***Family Meetings the Positive Discipline Way is focused on JOINT problem solving***, meaning our teens have space to share their opinions and ideas.

Here is a process to play with:

1. A member of the family shares the current problem they are having, and asks for ideas from the family
2. Each family member shares a solution (see more about solutions below).
3. The person who brought the problem chooses a solution to try for a week. If the problem includes others, everyone involved needs to agree on the solution.

Solutions are:

Related - to the problem

Respectful - of the needs of the person and the situation

Reasonable - make sense to all people involved

Helpful - leave people with new skills to practice the next time the problem comes up

Remember, as I have already shared, *when teens feel safe, heard, taken seriously, and helped, they are much more likely to want to participate in this process. As soon as they begin to feel attacked and discouraged, you will notice them withdrawing or sabotaging the meeting. When you find your family in this space, it's time to end the meeting.*

Invite your family to write down problems in the Family Meeting book, problems they would like help from the family to solve. Let them know, when they have a problem on the agenda, they will have the opportunity to share it, and invite the rest of the family to reflect on it as well.



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Other possibilities...

Contributions:

Known in some families as "chores," contributions are an important opportunity for our kids to build a sense of responsibility. Contributions happen because you are all sharing a space and living together. This is very typically a topic of conversation at Family Meetings. Remember that whatever routine you create for contributions can be fine tuned or shaken up during Family Meetings.

Allowance:

This is different for every family. I encourage you to consider looking at allowance as an opportunity to learn money management and not tie them to everyday chores. When our children were young they got "half their age" in allowance. As they got older that amount changed, as did what we were willing to pay for. This is a huge learning opportunity for our teens as they move towards having to manage their own money.

Review the weekly schedule:

As our kids have gotten older and my work schedule has changed, it seems to bring more calm to our daily routine when we review what is happening each week. I also have a white board in the kitchen with the weekly schedule written on it.

Mealtime prep:

The kids pick one day a week to help make dinner. We ask for their ideas about what they would like to cook. It is special time for the parent who cooks with them, as well as a contribution to the family (belonging and significance), AND teaches them life skills for when they are ready to make their way in the world.

There may be other elements you will eventually want to bring into your Family Meetings. Your teens will be very tuned in to the vibe you are creating, keep it encouraging and back off when you realize it has become discouraging. HAVE FUN!



Family Meeting Agenda



Date _____

Compliments:

Problem Solving:

Big things happening this week:

Family Fun Plan:

