

Fitz's Quick Fixes®:  
Family Meetings

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Modern life is increasingly complex, dynamic, and a pain in the ass to manage. Even intelligent, conscientious, and loving families can struggle to communicate and coordinate all the elements of daily life that they need to coordinate. Regular Weekly Family Meetings can help.

This guide is not intended to describe the only way to do a family meeting. This is one way, inspired by a number of other resources. Feel free to modify this format to fit the needs of your family.

## When

The adults in the family (adult children, parents, grandparents, or roommates) should find a day and a time when the family meeting can include the largest number of people most of the time. Some families may need an alternating schedule to ensure everyone can attend at least sometimes.

Many families I've worked with, including my own family, find that Sunday evening after dinner is the least likely time to be disrupted and the best time for us to prepare and coordinate for the week to come. Your mileage may vary.

## Who

Everyone in the family attends, including children. Everyone leads the family meeting in rotation. Children who are too young to lead the meeting independently (it requires reading, writing, and enough social skills to monitor the process) should have an adult guiding them in leading the meeting and taking over the tasks they are still learning.

## What

Before the first meeting, purchase a blank journal book to record the elements of the meeting.

## How

### Before any meeting

The leader gets the Family Meeting Journal and finds the first blank page. At the top they write the date, the number of the meeting (e.g., "#235), and prepares for the meeting by copying over any open agenda items to the current meeting agenda.

When the meeting time arrives, and the leader is prepared, the leader should announce that it is Family Meeting Time in a manner appropriate to the culture of your family. My family shouts, "FAMILY MEETING TI-IME!" once in the kitchen upstairs, once again at the top of the stairs, and then we knock on the door of any laggards. In other families, a quieter and more individual call to a meeting might be preferred.

When everyone has arrived, the leader announces the beginning of the meeting. My family likes doing this a little playfully, "Hear ye, hear ye, welcome to the #127<sup>th</sup> meeting of the

FitzMedMeier Clan.” How your family announces your meetings should be adapted to your family culture.

Then, the leader reads off general family reminders. The purpose of reminders is to help everyone remember the basic elements of family routines, schedules, and VERY important elements about how the family functions. Don't let this list get too long, or people will zone out.

In my family, our reminders include who is leading the meeting next week, street sweeping, Mama's bedtime and waking time, whether the cleaner or gardeners are coming this week, and a reminder to light the family meeting candle (a task younger kids love to do appropriately supervised by an adult).

What

Once the reminders have been read, the leader reads off the items currently on the agenda so everyone knows what will be covered.

Then, the leader asks each person if they have any new items. Younger kids will be inclined to add things that may seem frivolous. Validate how fun or important that is, and which family member will pick that up with them later, and the move on. But also, don't overlook the wisdom of kids in creating positive experiences for the family. For example, my family has "Family Playtime" once a month because my then 8-year-old suggested it. It's now an important aspect of our family togetherness.

Once new items have been added to the agenda, prioritize the items that need the younger kids to be present. This should include any items that directly affect them, but also items that teach them core values that your family has. For example, if you're making food for some sick friends in your community, include the conversation about that item in front of the kids. They'll soak up these kinds of values so much more effectively when they see you living them than if you tell them in the abstract that it is important.

Once all the items requiring the youngest kids are complete, they may be excused or can begin quiet activities in the same room. Then, go through the rest of the agenda with the rest of the family. As each item is completed, the leader should use some kind of mark to indicate that the item is resolved (i.e., doesn't need to be followed-up on in the next meeting) or not resolved. Our family uses this system:

Each item gets a circle in front of it like this

- Item 1
- Item 2
- Item 3
- Item 4

If Item 1 is resolved and doesn't need to come up again, the leader marks it like this:

- Item 1
- Item 2
- Item 3

Item 4

If Item 2 has been discussed, but needs to be reviewed next week, we put a checkmark in the original circle and add a new circle to the left:

- Item 1
- ✓ Item 2
- Item 3
- Item 4

The leader of the next meeting copies over the items with open circles next to them to begin creating the agenda for that meeting.

In our family, when some items are resolved, we cheer together, “Yay!” This let’s us create a sense of accomplishment and unity over our successes. Common agenda items that we “Yay!” include birthday celebrations, visits from family, completed household improvements, and individual achievements or milestones.

Once the agenda is complete, the leader begins the Calendar and Announcements phase of the Family Meeting. In this process, each person in the family reviews their calendar for the coming week and the family goes through one day at a time, making note of any exceptions to the normal routine, making sure that the basics of transportation, meals, grocery shopping, and chores are attended to despite any unusual calendar events. Don’t forget to review the kids’ schedules for sports, practices, field trips, etc. In my family, this is also the time that we review the meal plan for the week and identify who is doing the shopping and when.

When the meeting is over, the leader blows the candle out.

On the next page, I’ve provided a half-page model of the bookmark my family uses to mark our place in the Family Meeting process that serves as a guide for the leader. Feel free to modify as you see fit.

As always, I’m open to feedback about your experience and what works and doesn’t work from this tool.

## ORDER OF THE MEETING

1. Prepares the agenda
2. Call the family to the meeting
3. Reminders
4. Read the agenda
5. Call for new agenda items
6. Go through the agenda
7. Calendar and Announcements

## LEADER ROTATION:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Who is leading next week's meeting?

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## REMINDERS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

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