Bringing a family together is at best a challenge and organizing them may feel like an impossibility at times. To bring your family more unity of purpose and practice respect and mutual problem-solving, there are few better methods. A time-tested ritual in many families, family meetings can be woven into other identity-building activities, like having a snack, having a “game night,” or cooking together. Once they’re organized and participants bring their own agenda items with intention, you will see positive investment and momentum in the impact on all dimensions of your life together. Keeping notes in a “Family Meeting” notebook is very helpful in tracking changes, plans & ideas. However you choose to organize them, the family meetings stand as an effective tool to practice constructive communication, negotiate important plans or problems, and to develop a sense of success and confidence in the participants. Here’s a possible, suggested format.

It may be best to begin with an initial format for the first meeting, starting with simple **Ground Rules:**

* + One person talks at a time.
  + Everyone’s opinion matters and is needed in order to make good decisions.
  + Treat each other with respect.
  + Everyone has a right and responsibility to make their feelings known.
  + Attendance & participation of all family members is critical.
  + Create Win/Win Scenarios - "must give to get"
  + Trust is earned
  + Commitment to reach consensus, but when it’s not possible Mom & Dad have final say.

**Setting the Agenda** (Each family member/participant brings for discussion at least one concern and one hope for positive activity or change—for themselves of the family—to the meeting. If they did not prepare the agenda item, they can do it on the spot.)

* At first, this part of the meeting should be facilitated by a parent or caregiver, but after learning the format all participants should take turns in facilitating the meeting and the agenda setting.

**Personal Check-In** (Identify “High Points & Low Points” over the course of the last week. Each member can share briefly responses to those events and their current feelings in the present moment.)

* Highs & Lows
* Feelings right now

**Business:**

* Keeping of a family calendar: Where is everyone going to be? Special appointments or events? When is everyone expected to be home?
* Scheduling of “high use” resources in the home: the bathroom (in the AM), computer, rooms of the house, TV schedule, etc.
* Other items important to the running and coordination of family activites: times/places for grocery shopping, bill-paying, family meeting, play & leisure, sports, entertainment, worship, etc.

**Planning:**

* Develop and Review Weekly House/Yard work Plan:
  + Assign duties (and who will be in charge of keeping the family member accountable)
  + Review & discuss concerns: any patterns or difficulties in getting things done, consequences or rewards
  + Adopt a team approach: “There is no ‘I’ in ‘Team.’”
* Discuss or plan daily/weekly family activities: all are expected to attend
  + If possible, weave the family meeting into times of other important events or family activities.
* Requests:
  + Changes or special arrangements for events or duties set out on the family calendar. Other requests or accommodations.
* Other family activities and plans to “celebrate success” together

**Wrap-Up: Most Important “Gift” & Most Important “Take-Away”**  (Each member is invited to share what the single most important “gift” they received from the meeting is, and what the most important thing they “take-away” from the meeting is.)

* Wrap-Up Sharing: affirm and validate strengths & virtues, or concerns & limitations evident in the meeting that were particularly important to you.

Resources:

[www.internet-of-the-mind.com/**family**\_**meeting**.htm](http://www.internet-of-the-mind.com/family_meeting.htm)