

Managing Daily Family Life



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Once families become busy with work, school, outside enrichment activities, community service, and college and career planning activities, they can easily become overscheduled and stressed by the many demands for their time. Through weekly family meetings, families can sit down together and coordinate their daily schedules. They can determine how household chores will be completed, how to manage allowances, and how they will give back to their communities. Family members can discuss how they will address challenges and an emerging family crisis. They can celebrate successes as a family, discuss family activities, and plan for trips. Each family member can rotate responsibilities when serving as the meeting facilitator or a secretary to record family decisions.

Sample Family Meeting Agenda

A typical family meeting agenda may include the following topics:

A celebration and recognition of a family member's successes

A review of each member's household chores for the upcoming week

Clarification of allowances offered to various family members and weekly allowance payment

A discussion of the overall schedule for the coming week including parents' driving schedules for school drop-offs, afterschool coordinated activities, the childcare schedule, and any special events for the family

A discussion on any community service or volunteer activities for coordination

Ongoing planning for family mini vacations and a longer summer vacation

A discussion and updates on family members or friends who are ill, need added support, or any emerging family need

Anything else that requires discussion, coordination, or support services

Brainstorming Solutions at Family Meetings

Once a family becomes comfortable with the family meeting format, families can actively discuss challenging and difficult topics in relation to the family's values. If a family member is suffering from a debilitating illness, family members can brainstorm how they can support the family member per the following examples:

All family members can create a series of get-well

cards as a family art activity and one member can make sure to mail the card with a message weekly. Another family member can organize a dinner delivery plan with local neighbors, friends, the extended family, and a church group.

A parent can organize a driving schedule for doctors' visits.

A family member can help with the financial management of bills and household chores.

As family members work together as a unit and model effective problem-solving skills, the parents and their children model how families can effectively work together to manage daily challenges and emerging critical needs. This model will help children become effective in the daily management of their lives as they become more independent and seek career and college opportunities and experiences beyond their family.

Overcoming Life's Challenges

Over time, various family members will struggle with health crises, interpersonal growth, and academic challenges. It is vital for family members to support each other during their time of need. Through daily support, challenged families can effectively communicate their worries and concerns. They can problem-solve appropriate solutions that will meet the needs of the family. Effective problem-solving skills include:

Use effective listening skills for a family member who needs help.

Ask clarification questions for understanding.

Summarize what the other person has said to ensure comprehension and understanding.
Use empathy to guide the person when reflecting his or her feelings.
Support brainstorming solutions.
Have the problem-solver consider the positive and negative outcomes of each possible solution.
Assure the challenged family member that the proposed solution can be modified or changed if needed at a later date.

Building Resiliency Skills

As family members work through problems with supportive family and friends, they are able to build effective resiliency skills for future growth and development. By winning cooperation through effective problem-solving strategies, children learn responsible and disciplined consequences for their actions. Family stress can be managed by:

- Ensuring children and family members feel loved and supported
- Reducing conflict by overcoming power struggles through cooperative problem-solving strategies
- Supporting the need for independence while providing intra-dependent coaching
- Relying on extended family members and friends for added relief, respite, and support
- Partnering with children's teachers and schools for added coordinated resources
- Receiving support for community-based organizations
- Participating in family and parenting support groups

Cherishing each family member and valuing their participation in problem-solving and family meetings that reinforce their family's values

Added support is required when dealing with a parent's health crisis, addiction, unemployment, homelessness, divorce, incarceration, community disaster, or death. Sometimes families may need to receive added support from a family therapist, medical doctor, or social worker. At these times, parents can talk with their children about how they are working very diligently to solve a problem. When families have the courage to share their challenges along with their successes with their family, they can effectively model and coach their children to become capable and resilient adults.

May your family grow and thrive during these most difficult times in your life.

Mary Ann