

Family Monthly Meeting Calendar

By CJ Scarlet

Monthly Family Meetings

Daily check-ins are great and they're an important way to stay in close touch with your individual child's feelings and experiences on a day-to-day basis. Family meetings, on the other hand, are for talking through big issues that affect your whole family, like discussing family values or body safety topics, choosing where to go for an upcoming vacation, or announcing a major transition like a move to a new city.

Family meetings serve a number of purposes, including:

- **Reducing stress:** You can get everyone on the same page by syncing calendars and expectations.
- **Bringing dads into the loop:** Let's get real here; moms do the lioness' share of the work when it comes to managing the household and caring for the kids. (No offense meant, dads, but seriously, you've GOT to step it up! Props to the dads who are carrying their weight, and to single dads who are carrying it all!) Family meetings give slacker dads a chance to bond, clue them into what's going on with the rest of the fam, and make them part of the team.
- **Building a strong foundation:** Families that communicate regularly and have each other's backs are families that can weather any storm together.
- **Clearing the air:** When families create time to discuss issues affecting its members, problems don't fester and turn into crises.
- **Teaching your child valuable life skills:** During family meetings, your child will learn about cooperation and compromise, leadership, and decision-making, all of which will increase her (or his) social skills and self-esteem. It also ensures your child is taught vital body safety lessons in a supportive, nurturing environment.

Introducing the Idea to Your Child

Your 4 to 9-year-old is unlikely to complain about the idea of introducing regular family meetings, especially if you tell her they'll be followed by food and fun! Associating family meetings with pizza and games will cause everyone to look forward to them and want to participate.

Make it clear to your child that while you, as the parent(s) have the final say in all matters, her input is encouraged and will be respected. Whenever possible, let her make the decisions that will impact her.

Family Meeting Guidelines

Family meetings will work best if you have clear guidelines everyone can follow. For younger kids, especially, routine is important. Here are some guidelines to consider:

- **Have a schedule and block it off on your calendar.** I recommend choosing a day and time each month that's easy to remember, say, the first or last Sunday on the month at 5 pm (if you plan on having a pizza party and games afterward) or after your usual family dinner. Weekend days are best because there's less competition from work or school projects and, thus, less stress.
- **Rotate meeting responsibilities.** Have family members take turns being the leader, secretary, and timekeeper. Playing these roles will teach your child leadership skills and responsibility and make her feel important. She'll be ready to take on each of these roles, with help from you, when she's around 6.

The leader follows the agenda. The secretary takes notes of the topics that are discussed, decisions that are made, and issues that are placed in the "parking lot" (meaning they are to be discussed later in the meeting or at the next meeting). The timekeeper makes sure the meeting moves along at a brisk pace and doesn't go off on a tangent.

For kids 4 to 6, try to keep the meeting to 15-20 minutes. For children 7 to 9, shoot for 20-30 minutes. (Your meetings may go longer, depending on what you choose to cover.)

- **Discuss one topic and solve just one problem at a time.** If the conversation gets off base with too many issues being batted around, the leader (or parent, if the leader is a child) should pull in the reins, remind everyone what the topic on the table is, and ask the secretary to put all other issues on the "parking lot" list.
- **Only one person talks at a time.** Teach your child how to respectfully listen to others by ensuring only one person speaks at a time. Consider using a "talking stick." This could be as simple as a stick from the back yard, but it would be more fun and special if you and your child choose something meaningful, like a cool bedazzled wand or something that you decorate together. It could also be a

“talking rock” or stuffed animal. Choose something your child will respect as denoting the holder’s right to speak their truth.

- **Create a “no judgment” zone.** At the beginning of each meeting, remind your family members that no thought, emotion, or idea is off the table (within the bounds of good behavior and decency, of course). Especially when it comes to the Question and Answer (Q&A) portion of the body safety lessons, you don’t want to stifle or shame your child.
- **Use “I” messages.** Saying: “When you do X, I feel angry” is more productive than if you say in a blaming voice: “You make me angry.” (After all, no one can make us *feel* anything. We always have a choice in how we respond.)
- **Celebrate each other.** People, especially kids, are positively starving for validation and recognition. Many of us never got that from our families when we were growing up. Don’t be that parent. Lavishly celebrate each other’s accomplishments.

What to Cover in Your Family Meetings

It’s really important to establish a routine with your family meetings so they’re both fun and productive. Consider including the following:

- The designated leader opens with a favorite quote, poem, story, or prayer.
- The leader goes over the agenda so everyone knows what to expect.
- The secretary reads the ground rules:
 - This is a safe, confidential space. No one will share what we talk about outside the family unless given permission to do so.
 - Speak your truth, using “I” statements.
 - Everyone is to be respectful and treated with respect in return.
 - Only one person talks at a time. Everyone else listens.
 - It’s okay to disagree but keep it kind. No yelling or finger-pointing allowed.
- A parent talks about the body safety topic of the month.
- Q&A on the body safety topic.

- Roleplaying on the body safety topic. Make your child repeat what you've taught her and make her show you, rather than tell you how she'd react to an inappropriate situation or person.
- Make decisions as a family about things like vacations and family activities. To reach a decision, do the following:
 - Lay out the idea for everyone to consider.
 - Let each person take a turn sharing their perspective and suggestions. (Use the talking stick to keep the conversation in control.)
 - Discuss the pros and cons of each suggestion on the table.
 - Make a decision or agree on a solution. Remember that you (and your partner) have the final say, but you want to let your child's suggestions count. (To let her down easy, say: "You have really great ideas. I don't think we're ready yet as a family for a puppy, but we can discuss it again in six months," or something like that.) Choose her ideas whenever you can.
 - Develop a plan of action, including who's responsible for each task and when they need to do them. Make sure you give your child at least one task that's her responsibility. Even if she's only 4, you can find something for her to do to help.
- Share information that will affect all family members (e.g., a change in your child's school schedule or routine, an upcoming move, deciding whether to get a new pet, etc.).
- Plan and coordinate weekly schedules.
- Always end with a "freaking lovefest." It's simple: You pick one person at a time to be the object of everyone's attention. One by one, each family member tells the person who's "on the spot" something they really love about them. Once everyone else has shared something with that person, you move on to the next person who becomes the center of attention. Get creative and specific. Don't lame out and say: "I love you because you're kind." Say instead: "I love the way you share with your little brother. That's so kind of you. You're a great big sister."
- Bring it in for a hug!

Monthly Topics

In this section, I cover which topics you should cover each month over the course of one year and indicate on which page numbers those sections can be found in in both *Heroic Parenting* and *Badass Parenting*. (Unless otherwise indicated, the page numbers are the same in both books.)

Children under 3 are too young to fully participate in family meetings, so I don't address how to talk to them about these issues during family meetings.

Month 1

Talk about intuition & saying no:

- For children 3 to 5—pp. 152 & 154
- For children 6 to 9—pp. 185 & 189 in *Heroic Parenting*, pp. 186 & 190 in *Badass Parenting*
- For children with disabilities—p. 221 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 222 in *Badass Parenting*

Month 2

Talk about boundaries & body autonomy:

- For children 3 to 5—pp. 154 & 158
- For children 6 to 9—p. 186 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 187 in *Badass Parenting*
- For children with disabilities— p. 221 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 222 in *Badass Parenting*

Month 3

Talk about strangers vs. people your child knows; play the “Stranger Adventure Game:”

- For children 3 to 5—pp. 22-24
- For children 6 to 9—pp. 22-24
- For children with disabilities—pp. 22-24

Month 4

Talk about safe people vs unsafe people. Do the “safe people” exercise:

- For children 3 to 5—p. 159

- For children 6 to 9—p. 191 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 192 in *Badass Parenting*
- For children with disabilities—p. 222 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 223 in *Badass Parenting*

Month 5

Safe touch vs. unsafe touch; revisit how to say no:

- For children 3 to 5—p. 154 & 159
- For children 6 to 9—p. 190 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 191 in *Badass Parenting*
- For children with disabilities—p. 221 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 222 in *Badass Parenting*

Month 6

Talk about good secrets vs not-so-good secrets and telling vs tattling:

- For children 3 to 5—pp. 160 & 163
- For children 6 to 9—pp. 192 & 195 in *Heroic Parenting*, pp. 193 & 196 in *Badass Parenting*
- For children with disabilities—p. 222 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 223 in *Badass Parenting*

Month 7

Talk about how to respond to bullies:

- For children 3 to 5—p. 69
- For children 6 to 9—p. 69
- For children with disabilities—pp. 69 & 211 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 212 in *Badass Parenting*

Month 8

Talk about digital dangers & screen time; establishing rules & limits:

- For children 3 to 5—Not applicable (children this age should NEVER be on the Internet alone!)
- For children 6 to 9—p. 96
- For children with disabilities—p. 96

Month 9

Talk about what to do if your child gets lost:

- For children 3 to 5—p. 165
- For children 6 to 9—p. 197 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 198 in *Badass Parenting*
- For children with disabilities—p. 223 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 224 in *Badass Parenting*

Month 10

Talk about how your child should use the phone to call you or to call 911 for help:

- For children 3 to 5—p. 164
- For children 6 to 9—p. 196 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 197 in *Badass Parenting*
- For children with disabilities—same as for age groups above

Month 11

Talk about what to do if your child is approached by strangers or someone who wants to take them away:

- For children 3 to 5—p. 165 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 166 in *Badass Parenting*
- For children 6 to 9—p. 198 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 199 in *Badass Parenting*
- For children with disabilities—same as for age groups above

Month 12

Talk about how to use simple “Taz” self-defense moves in the event of an attack or kidnapping attempt:

- For children 3 to 5—p. 247 in *Heroic Parenting*, p. 248 in *Badass Parenting*
- For children 6 to 9—same as for age group above
- For children with disabilities—same as for age group above

Monthly Topics

If you have any questions about any portion of this handout, I urge you to read either *Heroic Parenting* (the PG-rated version) or *Badass Parenting* (the swearsy version) to learn more about each of the topics I suggest your talk about with your child.

To reach me directly, please visit my website at www.cjscarlet.com/contact.