

Positive Parenting  
November 2011  
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## MEETING OF THE MINDS AND HEARTS

... turn the hearts of children to their parents and parents to their children ...  
Malachi 4:6

The Christian Old Testament ends with these words. The prophet Malachi, speaking for God, describes what it will take to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. It was true 2000 years ago, and it is true today. It is in the midst of loving relationships that the Holy Spirit is at work, stirring up faith, opening hearts and minds to Jesus Christ, the Messiah. So, in this uber-busy culture, how might we take time to build those loving relationships in our families?

One profoundly engaging way to build strong families and loving family bonds is the family meeting. These have been around informally forever. Formal family meetings have been in the literature for years. A dear friend, loving parent, and parenting coach, Tamara Whear shared with me what she has learned in graduate school. Want to build your family into a strong and loving one, in which hearts of parents and children are turned to one another, finding Jesus at the center? Here are the elements of a family meeting:

### FOR THE FIRST MEETING

- Select a “talking piece,” something that can be held by each person, when they are talking. When they aren’t holding the talking piece, they are silent, listening to the person whose turn it is to talk. No interrupting.
- Set a date and time and place, being very clear that you expect all to attend.
- Begin by each person sharing what he or she loves about the family and about each of the other family members. Everyone has a turn ... or as many turns as they need.
- Set a time, date and place for the next family meeting. Everyone is expected to attend.
- The meeting ends when everyone is done.

### HOUSE RULES FOR EVERYONE

- At one of the first meetings, establish the house rules, by which all agree to abide.
- Go around, each person naming a rule.
- An adult will write them down, generalizing the rules so they apply to all. For example, if a child says, “Benny can’t take my toys,” it might be written as “We will all respect one another’s possessions and ask for a turn, instead of taking them.”
- Reread the rules. Get everyone to agree.

### WHEN A RULE IS BROKEN

- Everyone takes a 30 second break and a deep breath.
- No shaming or embarrassing.
- If a sibling acts like the authority, ask that child to give the child who has broken the rule an opportunity to “learn all the answers you already know.”

### PLANNING MEALS TOGETHER

- Invite all to plan meals together, striving to have something each person likes at every meal. Create simple guidelines for what each meal needs to include.
- Asks kids to participate in preparation of the food, setting the table, serving, and clearing. (Kids are much more likely to eat food they have helped prepare.)

### PLANNING TASKS AND CHORES

- Make a list of the tasks that need to be done routinely and come up with a way to divide them, so that everyone participates and helps the family.
- Hold everyone accountable. (Sticker charts can work for young children.)
- Celebrate accomplishments. The younger the child, the closer to the task they need you to affirm what they have done.
- When a big chore is done, one in which all have participated, have a family party to celebrate the accomplishment.

### PLANNING FAMILY FUN

- Family meetings should never be only about rules and chores. Make sure you plan family fun, too.
- Take turns suggesting fun things to do.
- As a family, make a list of all the free things your family can do together. Post it where you can use it to help choose in the future.

Blessings on your family meetings. For all of you, may it be a meeting of the minds and hearts!

### FAMILY ACTIVITIES

- Put a first family meeting on your calendar and let everyone know. (If you have done family meetings, but time has elapsed since the last one, let everyone know you are restarting them.)
- As a family, select a talking piece, which you will use only for family meetings. Suggestion: let it be something that is soft and safe and unbreakable, like a nerf or kush ball.
- At your family meeting, be clear about the guidelines for the family meeting. Write them down and post them, where all can see. If you have pre-readers, cut out pictures or take photos of your family doing it.
- Let the house rules be the ones you live by every day. Post them where you will all see them. Don't just point out when a rule is broken, but celebrate it when the family keeps the rules.
- Find many, many things to do together that are joyous.

Special thanks to Tamara Whear, Certified Life Coach from Adler Graduate School, and Tina Fiegal, Life Coach, who has been her instructor.