

## Robinsons on Parallel Family Meetings

Family relationships are a challenge! Families are stretched and stressed these days and members are pulled in many directions—often all at once! Rudolph Dreikurs, M. D., the grand interpreter of Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology introduced the idea of Family Meetings many years ago. Family meetings not only serve as a vehicle for peaceful relationships, but they also train the children in the principles of democracy, decision-making, cooperation, and leadership.

At ICASSI, the summer institute where counselors and parents learned how to apply Adlerian Psychology, we participants learned from Joyce Callus, from the tiny country of Malta, about the values of the Family Meeting.

Here are the guidelines for the meetings:

1. Plan an uninterrupted time of 30-60 minutes to sit together as a family.
2. Establish a safe environment in which family members feel comfortable in saying what they feel/think.
3. Issues brought up in the Family Meeting are not to be brought up during the week.
4. The meeting begins with a round of compliments.
5. I Statements are to be used. (I Statements, you may remember, only refer to one's own feelings and do not blame others.) When you \_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_, Please \_\_\_\_.
6. Members take turns to speak.
7. It is OK not to attend a Family Meeting, but all agreements are to be followed. (It pays to be there to have a say, right?)
8. The family may want to establish a mission statement. The idea here is to move the family to community service. This puts the family values into action. Ideas such as becoming

volunteers at an animal shelter, conserving electricity, and saving coins for charity are possibilities (but ideas are endless).

9.

Parents help the children learn HOW to think versus WHAT to think. The goal is for the parents not to impose their own ideas and solutions to the challenges that are brought up, but to allow the children to think things through.

10. Build self-esteem and self-confidence in all family members.

If family relationships are important to a family, (And we all know how extremely valuable family love and support is to children and adults alike), precious time will be carved out from tight schedules to give the family priority once a week.

Family Meetings develop sustainable family ties. Family members feel there is a place where they belong, are accepted and heard. It is a safe place where they can express themselves safely. They learn they can contribute to help others and get help. A feeling that “my contribution is valued,” is established.

When Family Meetings are handled with kindness and caring, a safe and open environment is provided. Children blossom when there is positive feedback and their strengths are acknowledged. Shoot! We all blossom when our strengths are acknowledged!

Conflicts and challenges are dealt with constructively. One sixteen year old who had grown up with Family Meetings in the home said, “There is a corner of the world I can go to when I don’t know what to do, and I will find support.” What wonderful training in democracy, encouragement, responsibility, and social interest!

