

Article 3- Positive Parenting During a Pandemic

Protective Factor: Family Meetings during COVID-19

We are all living in close proximity to our family members these days. Even though it has only been a little over a month, it sure can feel longer. Is anyone else feeling a little cooped up lately? Is your patience wearing thin at times? We are ALL feeling something. Family meetings can be a way to talk about issues that are impacting your family such as – the importance of replacing the toilet paper roll, picking up after yourself, an so on. It can also be a specific time to plan out your week, schedule in a fun activity (it's important to build in fun!) and support each other. There are no hard and fast rules about when or where you should have a meeting, the consensus is at least weekly, and at the best time for your family (are you morning people? night owls? nature lovers?).

Guiding Good Choices-Strengthening Families is a parenting program from Washington State University, which holds family meetings at the center of its teaching. Family meeting time should occur when everyone can attend and at the same location, if possible. The family meeting is where kids can feel heard and included in their family, which creates bonding, which leads to an increase in healthy behaviors (i.e. following your family rules). Your kids should be rewarded for participating! They may get to pick an activity, a favorite snack during the meeting, they may take turns as the meeting leader. Family's that include a regular meeting have children that are less likely to use drugs and alcohol and have better mental health! Seriously.

You can help your kids set an agenda for the meeting, perhaps have a board where anyone can write down meeting topics or needs. Remember the most important thing is to try! It may take time for everyone to buy in. Any age child can participate- perhaps your 2-year-old wants to talk about cats? Great! Have a discussion as part of your meeting about what your favorite cat looks like. At our house, family meetings are over dinner (at the end) and are mandatory. No one is forced to talk (we have a teen in the house), but everyone must be there. We also have ground rules for our meetings: No name calling, the meeting is not the time to call out your sibling (this can be done 1-on-1), everyone gets to speak, and everyone's input is valuable and important! Make up your own guidelines or ground rules, these are just examples.

So, for **homework this week**- schedule your first family meeting! Set a time, make sure everyone has advanced notice (perhaps it will take some bribery), and go for it! Keep the first meeting positive, plan a fun activity for the next week. As your meetings continue over the next weeks and months, you can start to talk about more serious topics and cover family rules. You may find your kids ask for an impromptu meeting if they have a concern- that is AWESOME! How amazing that they can feel empowered to get help from their family. Keep up the good work.