

Checklist for your first family meeting

<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare yourself	<p>Do some reading on what family meetings are and what purpose they can be used for. Think about and understand your personal goals in wanting to initiate family meetings. Contemplate how you think your family will view these goals – what is in it for them? Critically evaluate yourself to determine if you have the skills to facilitate the first meeting.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Identify your 'family'	<p>Who will you include in the meeting? Do you want grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, adults, children, spouses, significant others, step children?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Anticipate family member objections/difficulties and how you will deal with them	<p>Will any members not participate? Will any members try to take over the meeting? Will any members get angry or otherwise out of control? Will any members get on their soapbox or otherwise not listen and interact openly? Will any children be old enough for the subject matter?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Educate your family on family meetings	<p>Share your new-found knowledge on what other people are doing with family meetings. Share your thoughts on why holding family meetings will be beneficial to your. It can be best if you share these thoughts in a one on one or small group setting – to better gauge and respond to reactions and objections.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare your family to meet	<p>After educating your family on what family meetings are and your vision for your family, propose a general purpose for the first meeting and gather thoughts on agenda items from the members. See if there is interest from certain members to fill certain roles (note taker, joke teller, story teller, speech maker, facility prep or whatever). Determine their thoughts on how long the first meeting might run and a general time frame they could be available.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Set the agenda for the first meeting	<p>Based on your goals and the family members' thoughts, set the agenda for the first meeting, including anticipated time required for each agenda item. Be sure to include time (if needed) for family members to deepen their knowledge of each other – especially if new spouses or members who seldom interact are present. Be sure that there is a clear and measurable outcome included in the agenda items. Include humor and family story time if possible.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Select meeting location	<p>Some families use a neutral spot for the meeting, others rotate the meeting around different member homes. Make sure the location is as central or convenient as possible. Make sure the location and facility are large enough, comfortable enough and has appropriate services</p>

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	and facilities to handle the meeting (tables and chairs, presentation tools, flip charts, bathrooms, food, water, babysitting, heat/air and etc). Make sure that the participants won't be distracted by other things going on at the location (turn off the TV if you meet at home!).
<input type="checkbox"/> Set the date and timeframe	Make sure your primary participants and presenters are available. Understand how long each agenda item might take – then add some time to it. Build in time for breaks, family interaction, refreshments and questions/conversation.
<input type="checkbox"/> Decide what tools you may need	Will there be a presentation or videos? If so you may need a projector and a laptop with the right software. Is the room big enough so that you need a microphone? Do you need to cater in refreshments? Are there sufficient tables and chairs of the type you want to seat all members? Will you need to document discussion or parking lot items so everyone can see them – if so you may need Post-It flip chart paper that can hang on the walls. Are there brainstorming agenda items? If so, aids for brainstorming may be desirable (talking sticks, toys to release the family members' creative sides and etc).
<input type="checkbox"/> Select and coach a facilitator	<p>Do you or a family member have facilitation skills? If so, it might be best for the first meeting at least to be family only. Facilitators have skills in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structuring - keep the meeting moving and people on task • universalizing - identify other members with similar feelings and/or concerns • making the rounds - give each person in turn a chance to share • bridging - move the discussion from complaining and blaming to what can be done to make things better • promoting feedback - use open ended questions - are there any underlying issues (for example: being right, control or getting even) • promoting direct communication - each family member speaks for themselves and directly to the other members • brainstorming, evaluating, choosing and using solutions • promoting encouragement - in the absence of encouragement, family meetings will fail.

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<input type="checkbox"/>	Talk with the facilitator ahead of the meeting	Share your goals, any anticipated difficulties with individual members and your desires as far as letting conversations run vs. sticking to the time frames strictly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Select and coach a note taker	The note taker will also participate in the meeting - which is difficult. Make sure s/he understands that s/he is to publish the notes to the family afterward and insert any corrections family members suggest and then store the notes in the location designated by the family.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hold a pre-meeting or use the first part of the meeting to lay ground rules	Discuss ground rules or guidelines you should use during the meeting. If this is a separate meeting, keep it casual but make sure all of the participants for the first real meeting have a chance to provide input – whether that is in person, by phone, by conference call or in writing. If this is an agenda item for your first meeting, make it one of the first and try hard to reach consensus so that you can move forward to use decisions on guidelines during the rest of the meeting.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Make the meeting room ready	Arrange tables and chairs to make sure that members can interact on an equal footing – circle or u-shaped is optimal. Make sure all needed equipment is present and working. Get the food and drink set out. Make sure there is adequate parking available.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arrange for childcare if needed	If there are young children who are not involved, or not involved for the entire meeting it would be beneficial to have childcare for them.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Take care of physical needs	Are the bathrooms, open and supplied with toiletries? Are there refreshments for all ages and tastes available (snacks for young children and etc)?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hold the meeting	Stick to the specified time line. Stick to the specified ground rules. Treat each other with respect – really listen to each other. Make sure follow up items are captured and notes are taken. Remember, you are family, its OK if the first meeting doesn't go exactly the way you hoped. Don't force participation, encourage it.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Distribute the notes	Publish the notes where all participants can review them, solicit corrections and re-publish if you get them.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Solicit feedback	A few days after them meeting, survey the participants to see what they felt went well and what could have worked better. Find out if they feel there was value in meeting, and if so,

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what the value was for them. Solicit ideas for future meetings.