



GROUND RULES FOR FAMILY MEETINGS

- 1. Be present.** Demonstrate your respect and commitment by setting aside potential distractions. Turn off phones, cell-phones, iPads, laptops, and any other electronics. If you need to be reached in case of emergency for your children or business, designate a contact person if needed during the meeting. Be present at scheduled times so the meeting can get the job done. Devote room in your life and your heart to this meeting.
- 2. Be respectful in words, body language, and action.** Speak only that which is truthful, kind and necessary. Speak respectfully, pay attention when someone else is talking, and avoid jumping in to finish sentences. Avoid negative body language such as eye-rolling, shaking your head, or other indications of emotional reaction unless you follow up by talking directly about your reaction. Keep profanity to a minimum. If you have a question or point to make, wait for an opening or raise a hand to indicate you have something to bring up. You will appreciate it when others do that while you are talking.
- 3. Ask questions.** There are no stupid questions except the ones not asked. One purpose for the family meeting is to improve communication and to be sure that relevant information is shared. Be mindful, however, that not everyone is comfortable with sharing certain information “all at once” and that improving communication often takes time.
- 4. Be willing to edit what you say so it comes across better.** Saying anything and everything you feel under the guise of “honesty” can simply be a license to attack. Deliver your points with tact and respect. You will be more likely to be heard. Appropriate editing of your message will reduce the chances that other people will get defensive, which leads to breakdowns in communication.
- 5. Own your views as your own.** Make “I” statements rather than broad, global statements that imply you know the truth or that something “is obvious.” Saying “everyone knows that is ridiculous” is unhelpful and destructive to communication. Saying, “I really disagree with what you just said” is more honest and may be more accurate. If others do share your views, it will be clear there is a shared perspective on an issue. If it turns out your view is not shared by others, you may then open up to new viewpoints or solutions.
- 6. Avoid indirect communication.** Families are notorious for allowing indirect communication and alliances. Indirect communication allows avoidance of conflict rather than resolution of problems. It can in fact make small problems grow into feuds between allied camps. Deal directly with whomever you have the conflict with whenever possible.