

THE FAMILY MEETING

The family meeting process has been used successfully by family units to establish and maintain an elevated level of communication based upon honesty and openness in the disclosure of feelings. This process will work with any family unit of two or more people living together. To be effective, all persons living together under the same roof must participate; it just doesn't work if any member is excluded.

THE FAMILY MEETING PROCESS

1. Select a sacred time that's agreeable to all family members. It is **essential** the sacred time be honored; all other family and individual activities must be planned around this time. Keeping this sacred time is a covenant by each individual which gives honor to the importance of the family unit.
2. The family meeting is held once a week at the agreed upon sacred time.
3. Family members will take turns convening the meeting. The convener will begin the meeting by sharing his/her own reality with other family members. This self-disclosure is designed to include all positive and negative feelings. For example:
 - **"This is my hurt, my pain . . . "**
 - **"I am feeling guilty for having done . . . "**
 - **"I feel angry when . . . "**
 - **"I feel proud of myself for . . . "**
 - **"This is the space I am in right now . . . "**

It is extremely important that the person sharing only talk of his or her own feelings. This is not the time to talk about others, nor is this the time to lecture, preach or gripe.

4. No one is allowed to interrupt the one who is disclosing him or herself. Other family members must listen until it is their turn to share.
5. When the first person is finished sharing, the next person is not to answer or defend against feelings previously shared by another, but begins to share his or her direct feelings.
6. This process continues uninterrupted until all have shared.
7. When all family members have finished sharing, a discussion period is held only for the purpose of clarification. It is important to keep this time free from advice, argument and problem solving. Stick only to clarifying what was heard to be certain it was what the other person really meant to convey.
 - **"I heard you say . . . , does that mean you were . . . ?"**
 - **"I didn't understand what you meant when you said . . . "**
 - **"Please repeat . . . I'm not sure I really understood you."**

8. In the event of a disagreement or fight, no one is allowed to leave the room until an agreement has been reached which is satisfactory to all family members. Difficulties can be solved by honest conversation which honors each person's individual feelings. Fighting is not necessarily bad. If the fighting is fair, communication continues. The real enemy of communication and relating is silence.

REMEMBER:

- Never attack. Keep the focus on self, using I statements. I feel, I sense, I think, I will...
- Repeat everything you think you hear to the person who said it. "I heard you say...."
Then listen for the confirmation.
- Regardless of how foreign to your own ideas and values, take everything that is said seriously. Making light of another's honest feelings is a devastating putdown.

This process is not intended to solve individual problems which are best served by qualified therapists. It is an excellent means of how to use openness and honesty to help nurture the family unit by promoting self-disclosure and the art of listening.