



**CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION**  
*A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition*  
*Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol*



**ARTICLE 25 – September 3, 2008 – Family Meetings**

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Has your youth ever waited till the last minute to tell you they needed something for a school project or to ask for a ride? The short notice inconveniences you, yet they plead, “But I need it now!” as if a lack of planning on their part should unquestionably constitute an emergency on your part! Every caregiver has at some point encountered the challenge of managing competing schedules, school demands, and the “emergency” demands of their children. Families are busy, with parents working, chores, errands, and youth involvement in a variety of school, sports, and social activities. Family meetings can be a great way to get organized – and to bond as a family!

At first, finding time for meetings may seem impossible, but making the commitment will save time in dealing with problems later. It also is an opportunity to carve out time for family fun, which as youth grow into teens, with busier schedules and a greater desire to be with friends, seems to become more scarce.

- Pick a time when all family members can be present. Make a commitment to setting the time aside – only 15 to 20 minutes are needed.
- Introduce the meetings as a way that the family can discuss schedules, household responsibilities, and family concerns, as well as share a few minutes enjoying a treat or playing together.
- Identify one family member to take notes in a notebook. Review the previous meeting’s notes. Checking back helps to ensure that agreements are working.
- Start the meeting by sharing ground rules which should include: respecting opinions, no put downs or criticism, and no lectures. The goal is to work together and support each other.
- To set a positive mood for the meeting, start with a round of compliments. Have each family member say something nice to the person next to them. Caregivers should start. By modeling how to give compliments, you demonstrate the value in treating others with kindness and encourage respect and teamwork.
- Spend a few minutes reviewing schedules and marking a calendar with activities and transportation needs.
- Review family responsibilities. Set and agree upon specific expectations. Acknowledge youth for their positive efforts. Remember there are many rewards that don’t cost money, such as having a friend over, staying up later, or playing a game together.
- Family meetings should be short, focused, and light. They are not meant to discuss serious concerns, such as marital problems or serious school or discipline problems. Sometimes, however, they can be a time for joint problem solving on topics such as chore responsibilities or sharing computer time. Problems that have no quick solutions, don’t involve all family members, or involve strong emotions are not appropriate for family meetings.
- Discuss special family projects and vacations. Everyone can be involved in the fun of planning!
- End the meeting with a special snack or activity that the whole family can enjoy like playing a game, watching a movie, or going for a walk.

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