

THE FAMILY COUNCIL: LEARNING PEACEFUL COOPERATION

by

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Theme: The Family Council helps families to respect and appreciate each other as persons equal in the sight of God, to live more happily and productively together, and to carry into the world the value of harmony and peaceful cooperation.

How to Use This Program: This program can be used with a group of parents, or adapted for use as a multigenerational learning activity for families at church. It is suitable for use as a Sabbath afternoon program, an Adventist Youth meeting program, or for use at family camps and church retreats. The approximate time involved is one hour.

Preparing for the Program: Prepare a setting that represents a living room, or other room at home where the family might gather for a weekly meeting. If possible, set up this "room" in the middle of your meeting area where those in attendance can gather around the "family."

Supplies and Props:

- Tablet and pencil for the secretary of the family council to keep notes.
- Name tags and pens to identify members of the "family"
- Flip chart or chalkboard

Handouts:

Prepare a sufficient number of copies of **Handout #1A** and **Handout #1B *The Family Council***.

PRESENTATION MODULE

Introduction

One of the ways which many families have found to help their family life run more smoothly, to communicate the values of equality, mutuality and peaceful coexistence is to hold a regular family meeting which we call "The Family Council." In this program we will learn about the Family Council and practice how to conduct such a meeting.

Selection of the "Family": Choose persons at random from the participants to be members of the "family." If a multigenerational audience is present for the meeting, select a father, a mother, one or more grandparents or other relatives, children of various ages, and any others who might be present in one of the kinds of families found in your church. If adults only are present, ask for volunteers or designate certain individuals to represent parents, children and other family members.

(When the "family" has been selected, give them a little time to "settle in" by deciding on a family name for themselves, such as the household of Jacob, of Daniel, or of Chloe, etc. Have the family assign names and ages to each of the family members, where their home is located, and what time of year it is. Use name tags for each of the family members so that their names and ages

can be remembered.)

Using the material which follows, give a brief summary of the purpose of the family council. Address the "family," but with all other seminar participants listening.

What is a Family Council?

A family council is a planned time for a meeting of all family members together. Though it could meet on Sabbath, it will probably get together on another occasion during the week—perhaps a Sunday morning after breakfast or on a weeknight after the evening meal. It can be a natural follow-up to family worship. Each family will have to give the meeting time some thought and settle on their own particular time.

At this meeting anything can be discussed. There is freedom to talk about anything you have on your mind without fear. You can discuss needs, ideas, wants, events, vacations, home duties, problems, finances. It is a time for talking and sharing together. At this meeting planning can be done, decisions may be made, conflicts may be resolved, BUT *the major purpose is to improve relationships.*

Who's in charge? You should have a chairman and a secretary for each meeting. The chairman, who may be a woman or a man, a girl or a boy, directs the meeting and the secretary keeps notes and records the decisions and actions to be carried out. Although parents may take the leadership of some meetings, these positions should be passed around, if children are old enough.

(At this point, have the "family" select the chairman and secretary for this meeting and its "next" meeting.)

How long will the meeting last? Generally it will be short—from a few minutes up to 20 or 30 minutes. It might go longer than this, especially if you're having an enjoyable time. If there is general agreement, you may extend your meeting a few minutes longer—perhaps to finalize on something urgent. One way to stay on time is to select someone with a watch or timer as time keeper. This individual can notify the chairman when the agreed upon time has passed.

(Have the "family" select a timekeeper.)

What do we do first? Each person tells about a positive or exciting event that happened to him or her during the past week. An alternative to this would be for each person to share a positive comment about each other person in the council ("What I really appreciate about _____ is that . . ."), or have each person tell about one good thing that he or she believes has taken place in the family since the last meeting.

(Let the chairman of the family council decide which of these the "family" will do and have them begin their role play. When this part of the council time is completed, proceed with the presentation module.)

Agenda. Basic categories to cover:

- Minutes from the last meeting, including review of solutions to previous problems.
- Calendar of activities for the coming week.
- Allocation of chores for the week.

Sharing concerns. Some families have a sign-up sheet on the family bulletin board where concerns and agenda items can be listed preferably ahead of time for the family council.

However, any family member can feel free to contribute topics to the agenda at the time of the meeting. Unfinished agenda items may need to be carried over to a subsequent meeting. If any family members have concerns, needs, problems or frustrations, the family council is the time to share them. They should be shared without assigning blame to anyone.

A helpful way to share to concerns. A helpful way to state concerns is to express your personal feelings about them. "When (*identify the problematic behavior which happens without naming anyone or blaming*), I feel (*upset, angry, frustrated, concerned, or whatever the feeling may be*) because (*state the effect it has on you*)." For example, mother might say, "When the dirty laundry is not taken to the laundry room, I feel frustrated because it means extra trips back and forth to the laundry room for me."

(Place the "formula" for sharing concerns on a flip chart or chalkboard and encourage the "family" to state their concerns using this technique:

"When _____ (behavior happens),
I feel _____ (identify your feeling)

because _____ (state the effect on you)."

(Give the family members opportunity to share their concerns. If none are forthcoming spontaneously in the role play, then you may send in on slips of paper some concerns which you have devised for the occasion to help the family practice the process of managing concerns. For example: Child: Favorite foods are not served often enough; Teen: Older brother, with whom he shares a room, plays music too loudly; Dad: Pet is not fed regularly; Mom: Clothing is left strewn on the floor. Help the family members to frame their concerns using the technique described.)

Exploring alternatives and solutions. Possible answers to concerns are discussed and alternative solutions to problems are offered. The secretary makes notes of the concerns and the solutions which have been suggested. Plan to evaluate the solution(s) at the next family council. Some concerns may be more involved or may take longer to solve than the time available in the family council. For this or other reasons they may need to be handled in another fashion. But the family will have a satisfying experience if as a group it can respond in some helpful ways to the needs of its members.

(Let the family respond to problems presented in non-blameful ways, discussing the needs of the individuals concerned. Help the family to process the concerns so that the feelings of each individual are heard. Demonstrate for them how to brainstorm a number of possible solutions without evaluating them. Then, through a process of elimination, discover which possibility or combination of possibilities could be a workable solution.)

Family business. Now is the time to share family news, schedule activities, assign chores and plan special events. Each person's responsibilities are posted on a bulletin board.

(The "family" role plays this part of the family council.)

Closing the family council. Close with a prayer and expressions of thanks to one another. Have a special treat, take a walk or play a game.

(The "family" closes its meeting.)

Some Additional Thoughts on the Family Council

- Hold councils regularly, not just for emergencies.
- Parents should plan ahead for it to be as enjoyable as possible; it is not a time to mete out punishment.
- Limit the amount of time spent dealing with complaints, conflict and chore assignments to half the meeting; otherwise interest will fade.
- Parents should take their turn with distasteful household chores.
- Each member has an equal voice and equal vote.
- Avoid "winners" and "losers" in decision-making as much as possible. Strive for consensus.

Importance of Commitment to the Council Concept

The continuation of the council is important, because at first it is difficult for children to believe that their parents really mean to treat them as equals, to listen to them, and to take their suggestions seriously. If parents keep on trusting the strength of the family in the Family Council, it will come to have a life of its own. The Family Council is not another in a long list of remedies for a family to try when all else has failed. It is a way of bringing together all family members to grapple with their mutual concerns. In order for it to function effectively, it must continue through dull weeks as well as exciting weeks. The temptation may be great to skip a meeting now and then, and this is not a calamity; what is important is that parents not lose their trust in the concept. For every family that wants efficiency and harmony, as well as for every individual who lives in close collaboration with others and wants to function fully and happily, it is essential to recognize social equality for all—expressed through shared responsibility in the Family Council. The unjust assumption of superiority of one person or one group over another is the basic cause for social conflicts, especially those of marriage and family. (Dreikurs, R., Gould, S., & Corsini, R., 1974, pp. 8, 9.)

References

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