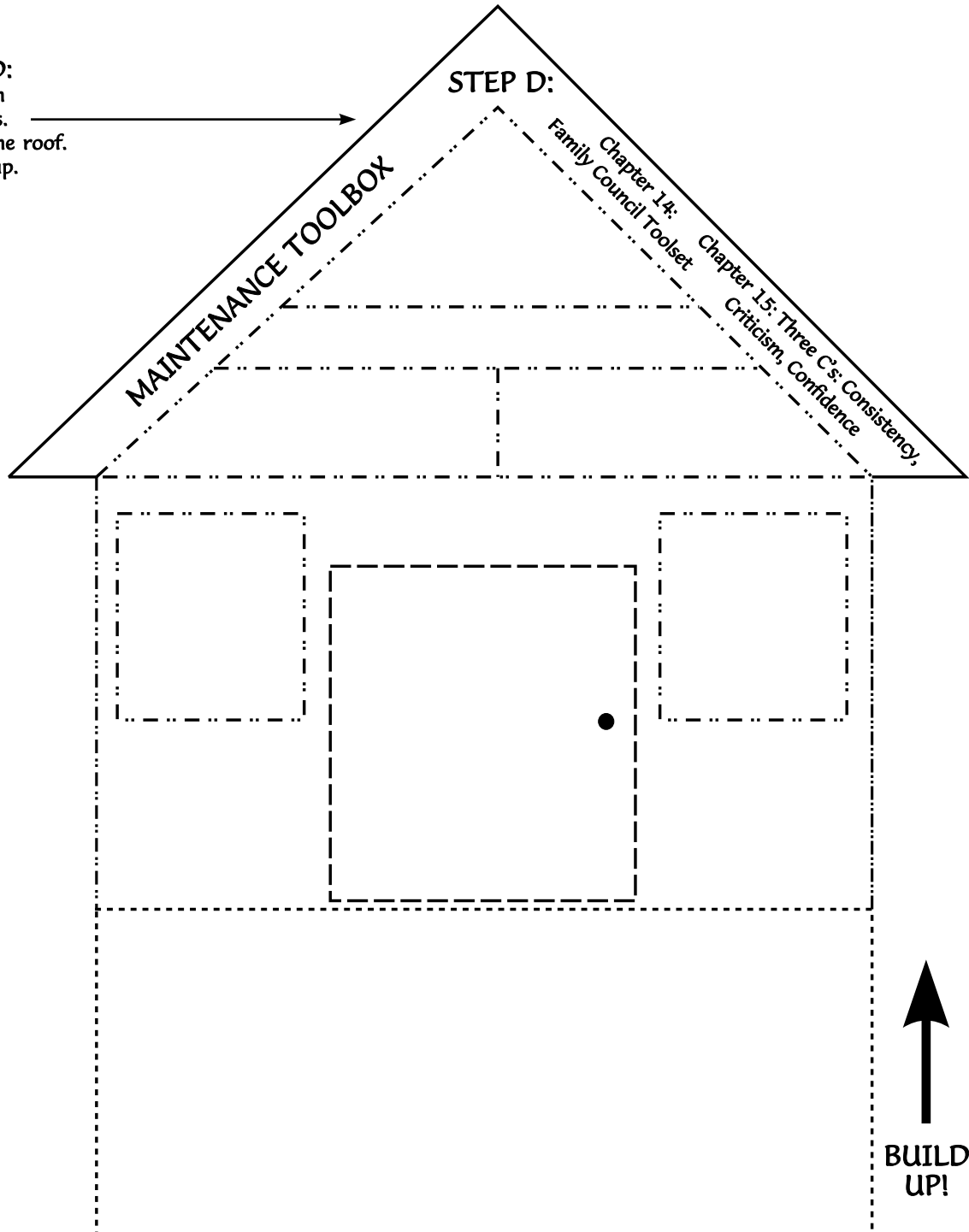


STEP D MAINTENANCE TOOLBOX

STEP D:
Maintain
progress.
Check the roof.
Follow up.



STEP

D MAINTENANCE TOOLBOX

Every home needs a roof, to protect the dwellers from harsh outside elements. The roof is always present; it doesn't just appear in stormy weather. The roof (and other parts of the house) need regularly scheduled maintenance. We can use all types of tools for these maintenance checks.

In families, we use the Maintenance Toolbox and the many tools we've learned to maintain progress. The Maintenance Toolbox is represented by a roof; it is always there. This reminds us to have family councils regularly, not just when family storms are brewing, and to take care of ourselves. When we maintain our progress, both in the family and in our personal growth, our family becomes a safe haven when the storms of life try us.

IN THIS SECTION

The Maintenance Toolbox contains two chapters:

Chapter 14, “Family Council Toolset,” helps us maintain our *family's* progress; it is the last toolset in *The Parent's Toolshop*. While we have most of the tools we need to conduct family councils, there are certain tools and rules for using them that we still need to learn. There are also several ways that family councils can break down, so the tips we learn will help us get started on the right foot and prevent common problems.

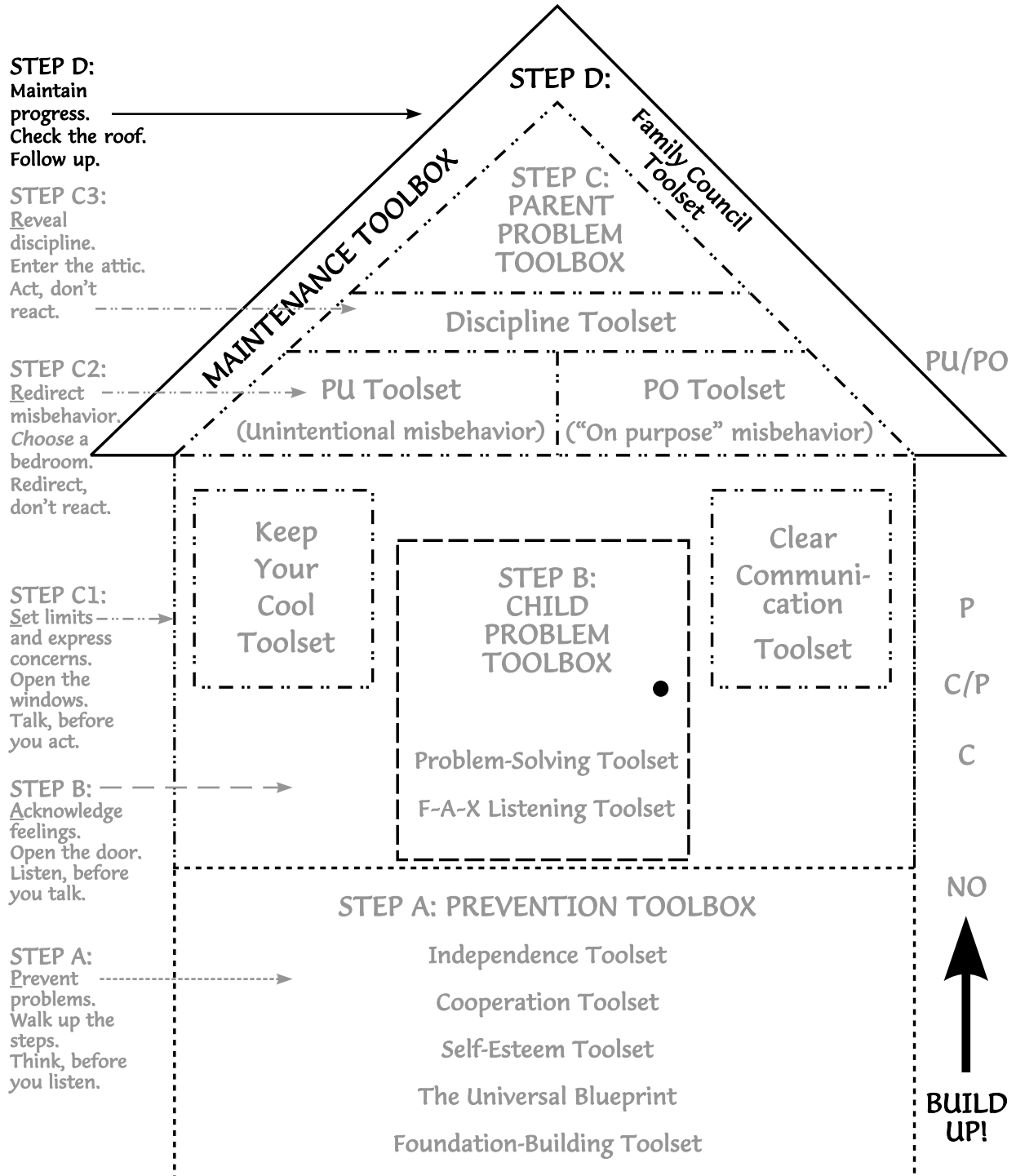
Chapter 15, “Three C's: Consistency, Criticism, and Confidence,” helps us maintain our *personal* progress. We learn how to maintain our consistency, handle criticism and unwanted or unhelpful advice, and to sustain our confidence. This last chapter gives us a final booster shot to sustain us through the coming years and months—when we have finished reading this book, but are still establishing new habits and growth.

WHEN TO USE THE MAINTENANCE TOOLBOX

We can use the Maintenance Toolbox *anytime*, to prevent or resolve problems that affect the family (Family Council Toolset) or to stay on track with our personal growth (Three C's).

CHAPTER 14

FAMILY COUNCIL TOOLSET



CHAPTER

14 FAMILY COUNCIL TOOLSET

*If we perform regular maintenance on our house, we can sometimes prevent problems or solve them before they get worse. If we don't do regular maintenance, we are always moving from crisis to crisis. In families, we want to have regularly scheduled family councils, not just when there is a problem. If we have ongoing family councils, we can use **all** our effective parenting tools to prevent problems, make family decisions, teach skills, and enrich our family relationships.*

IN THIS CHAPTER

When families hold regular, productive councils, children *and* parents look forward to them and actively participate. There are many pitfalls families can fall into when conducting family councils. That's why it's important to know what to do, and what *not* to do. The Family Council Toolset asks us to consider three important ideas:

1. Family councils are possibly *the* most important factor in building healthy families.
2. When we hold family councils, we use almost all the tools in *The Parent's Toolshop*. We just make a few adjustments to apply the tools to the whole family.
3. There are several myths about family councils and ways they can turn sour. The Family Council Toolset reveals these potential problems and offers suggestions for holding positive, constructive family councils that are a sweet experience for all.

WHEN TO USE THE FAMILY COUNCIL TOOLSET

We use the Family Council Toolset weekly, to hold regularly scheduled family councils. We can also use the ideas and tools in *The Family Council Toolset* to make any decision or solve any problem that affects the entire family.

THE PURPOSE OF FAMILY COUNCILS

Today, families are so busy, they sometimes stay in touch on the run, only stopping to communicate when there are problems. Listening to children's ideas takes time and energy. It seems faster and easier for parents to make all the decisions and solve all the problems. When families *do* spend time together, many are often in front of the television. Parents might scold children who talk, because they are bothering others. Meeting regularly to talk to each other can seem awkward and unnatural. It's not surprising so many parents resist regular family councils.

Healthy families spend time together regularly to share their joys, frustrations, and daily happenings. Their conversations go beyond superficial issues and scheduling activities. They get to know each other on a deeper level. Parents listen with respect to their children's opinions and involve them in making decisions that affect them. Because they talk often, healthy families avoid many potential problems. When problems do arise, parents involve children in solving them.

A family council is a regularly scheduled time when family members get together to accomplish any or all of the following goals:

- Listen to one another and express joys, feelings, concerns, and ideas.
- Show appreciation and give encouragement.
- Build a sense of family unity, helping family members feel important.
- Make decisions about issues that affect the family.
- Resolve problems and deal with recurring issues.
- Discuss values and teach skills that help each member throughout life, both inside and outside the family.
- Plan and have family fun.

THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY COUNCILS

Effective family councils have many positive short- and long-term results, including the following benefits:

- **A sense of teamwork.** Family members feel they each have a unique contribution to make to the family team. Members work together and support each other.
- **Increased cooperation.** In the family council, parents *and* children take turns planning activities and topics. The family works together to make decisions and solve problems. Because children are involved in setting rules and making decisions, they are more likely to follow through. They complain less, because they've already had a chance to voice their opinions and have them considered in the plan.
- **Increased self-esteem.** Each family member feels important, both as a respected individual and needed member of the family.
- **Decreased rivalry and competition.** Power struggles diminish between parents and children and among siblings. Since family councils have rules of conduct, siblings take a break from teasing and criticizing. (Maybe the only break that week!) They have opportunities to compliment each other and build on the strengths of their relationships. They learn to work together and establish a deeper bond—one that can't be swept away by the winds of competition and jealousy.
- **Improved behavior.** When children feel they belong, can express their feelings, and be respected, they naturally misbehave less.
- **Development of life skills.** This is perhaps the most important benefit. Anyone who participates in a family council learns the following skills, which are useful in the family, in the business world, in adult relationships, and any other relationships:
 - Give encouragement
 - Develop a cooperative leadership style
 - Listen with respect
 - Work together as a team
 - Express feelings respectfully and appropriately
 - Brainstorm and problem solve
 - Reflect and summarize others' thoughts and feelings
 - Make responsible decisions
 - Organize and plan activities
 - Accept responsibility and follow through with commitments
 - Have fun and play with others cooperatively

Any family can hold council meetings. Families with young children can simplify the structure and just focus on fun. Families with teens can discuss issues of concern to adolescents.

Single-parent households can still hold family councils although one parent will not be participating. Families *can* discuss the shared grief and adjustments that can result from the separation, divorce, or

death of a parent. Increased teamwork and bonding reduces stress and provides support to each family member. In families affected by divorce, the family council is *not* an appropriate forum for discussing matters that relate to the children's relationship with the absent parent. Those matters are between the children and the absent parent. *If* parents get involved in these issues, they need to handle them individually, using one-on-one problem solving (Child Problem Toolbox)—but only if they can be objective. (No criticizing the ex-spouse!)

Foster families find that family councils are particularly helpful when bringing new foster children into their family. Many foster children come from homes in which fear, anger, withdrawal of love, neglect, or abuse was the norm. The foster child's family rules are usually different from the foster family's. Most importantly, foster children usually have low self-esteem and expect rejection. The positive tone of family councils can give them the encouragement and life skills they might not have learned. The family council experience can make a great impression on a foster child's life.

A Personal Story. When I worked at a runaway shelter, we had regular "house meetings." Although there were some set rules, teen residents shared their ideas, concerns, and problems. We jointly planned the menu, grocery list, chore roster, and recreational activities. These teens, who were feeling rejection from their own families, gained a sense of belonging, acceptance, friendship, responsibility, and respect from the house-meeting experience.

Blended families particularly benefit from family councils. Blended families are two separate families with different expectations, personalities, and ideas who are becoming a new unified family. Rules, roles, and responsibilities need to be redefined. Children resist and rebel if the "new" parent makes these decisions for them. Involving children through family councils creates new, jointly-agreed-upon rules and roles. Just as important, family councils help new parents and step-children get to know each other, providing a safe place to share fears and hopes for the family. Family members develop a feeling of being on a *new* team—one where each member is important to the whole team.

School classrooms and other groups can also modify the family council ideas to fit their needs. (A terrific resource for teachers is *Positive Discipline in the Classroom*, by Jane Nelsen, Lynn Lott, and H. Stephen Glenn; Prima Publishing, Rocklin, CA 1993.)



FAMILY COUNCIL ROLES ☆☆☆☆

There are four roles every family council needs, despite the format or other optional roles families can choose. (If there are less than four family members, someone can take on an additional beginning or ending role.) Have someone in the family be responsible for the following roles:

1. The **Leader** starts and ends the meeting on time, makes sure all points-of-view are heard, and helps keep members focused on the issues. The Leader models mutual respect and effective communication skills. Parents can be the Leader first, to model the skills. Then the family can rotate the responsibility between children and parents. Generally, school-aged children can serve as the Leader with adult guidance. A good way to start is by co-leading with the child. Explain the basics of the Leader's role and the decision-making process. Let the child move through agenda items and problem-solving steps. Only step in to remind the child of procedures.

It can be tricky for the Leader to shift roles, from leadership responsibilities to a family member with personal opinions, ideas, and feelings. As family members become skilled in respectful communication, they will naturally offer comments and suggestions that a Leader might offer. Also, children who lead a family council become increasingly skilled at shifting gears and keeping the discussion on track.

A Personal Note. *Chris suggested the title of “The Big Cheese,” for this role. It doesn’t matter what you call a position, as long as someone performs the tasks. When Amber was the Leader, at age 3, she sat on my lap. I helped her read the agenda items and whispered comments in her ear to keep the discussion moving.*

2. The **Recorder** takes notes during the meeting of ideas generated in problem-solving sessions, issues discussed, and decisions or plans the family makes. Families can have a family council notebook which contains a record of past agendas and decisions. This record is helpful if members need to remember agreements made in the past.

Amber wanted this role before she could read or write, so she used a tape recorder, which she really enjoyed!

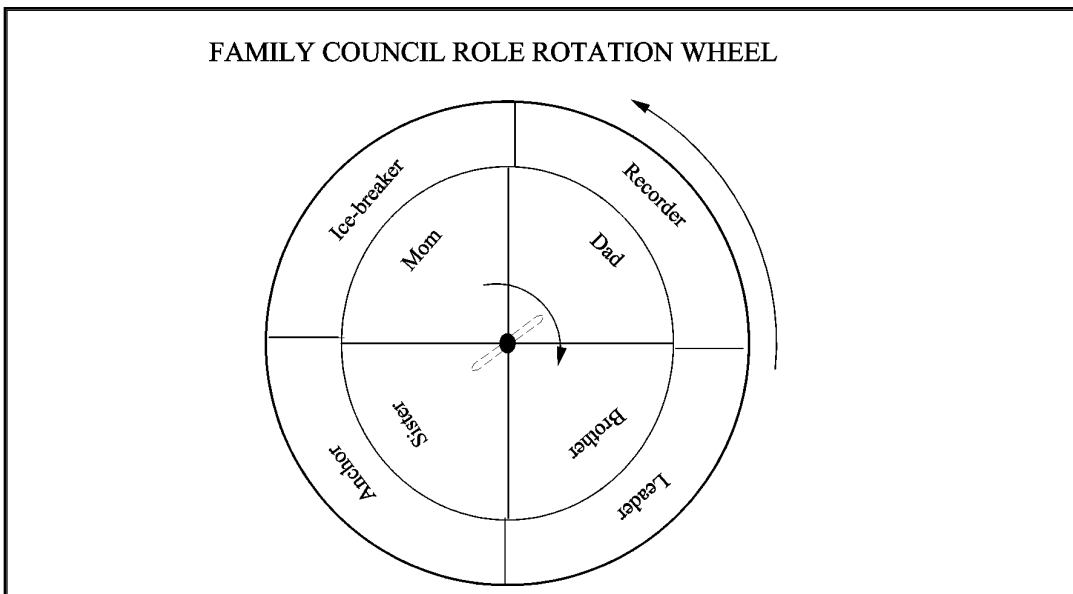
3. The **Icebreaker** decides what opening encouragement activity to use. This starts every family council with people talking, feeling, and thinking positively. There is a list of possible icebreakers at the end of this chapter. For example, “One good thing that happened to me this week is ____.” Be creative or draw from group activities you’ve experienced or read about.
4. The **Anchor** selects a positive closing activity. This ensures that the family council will always end on a positive note. The activities can be similar to the icebreaker’s. They might also include something like each person making a commitment to do something in particular the following week. This could be giving a compliment to someone or doing a good deed.

In our family, we have an activity and end with a family prayer—the kids insisted that we include the dog in our prayer circle.

Start and end every meeting on a positive note. If the family only discusses decisions and problems, members may view the council as a negative experience and resist coming back.

Rotating Roles

One way to rotate roles equally is to make a two-wheeled gadget with each person’s name on the outer wheel and roles on the inner wheel. Attach the wheels with a two-pronged brass fastener. Each week, turn the wheel one space, so everyone has a new role.



If a family has only two members, a single parent and child, one can have a leadership role (Leader or Recorder) and a “fun” role (Icebreaker or Anchor-person.) Besides these four roles, there are other optional roles, based on the format you choose. Read over the following format options and select (in your first family council meeting) those features and roles which suit your family best.



FORMAT OPTIONS

If a family follows some basic guidelines, they can decide on their own the structure and details of their family council. Some family councils are formal and structured, almost like a business meeting. Others are informal and less-structured. *Some* structure and flow are necessary, or discussions get side-tracked and people feel frustrated. Each format has additional roles that family members can share or rotate. If young children want a role that seems too difficult, parents can help them with the task. Let the child decide what to do and how to do it. Work side-by-side, teaching skills and only helping with physical tasks that might be too difficult.

Formal Business Meeting Format

This format works well with older children who have good verbal skills, particularly teens. The focus is on communication—sharing opinions, making decisions, and setting rules. The roles and agenda are more business-like.¹

FORMAL BUSINESS MEETING ROLES

- The **Leader**'s role is the same as described earlier.
- The **Recorder** in a formal meeting writes the “minutes,” a summary of what was decided. The Recorder then reads this report aloud at the beginning of the next meeting. If the recorder tapes the meeting, someone needs to write a summary of decisions for the family council folder.
- The **Ice-breaker**'s role is the same as described above.
- **Additional, optional roles:**
 - The **Discussion Topic Leader** chooses a topic to discuss—an important feature for family councils with older children and teens. These issues are not complaints or problems within the family. They are topics about which family members might have different values or opinions. This gives parents and children a chance to practice talking about important values and issues they might not agree on. Each family member voices a nonjudgmental opinion, listens to others' opinions with respect, and maintains a calm, nondefensive attitude. These are time-limited, “third person,” general discussions, not discussions about any particular parent, child, or person. There is a list of possible topics at the end of this chapter. Have children add topics of interest to them.

FORMAL MEETING AGENDA

1. Opening icebreaker.
2. The Recorder reads the minutes of the previous meeting.
3. “Old business.” Discuss any issues left unresolved from last time.
4. “New Business.” Discuss any issues, problems, or decisions the family has listed on an agenda that is posted throughout the week. Usually, families discuss issues in the order they are listed, which motivates children to put their issues on the agenda before the meeting. If there are no issues, the family can discuss a topic.

5. After discussing as many agenda items as time allows, the Recorder summarizes the meeting by reviewing decisions, agreements, and commitments. The Leader confirms everyone's commitment to the decisions they reached.
6. Family members agree on roles for the next meeting and record any issues they didn't get to discuss. A blank agenda is posted for issues members want to discuss at the next family council.

Informal Family Council Format

The informal family council is more fun-oriented, but is still structured. The family talks and takes care of family business, but there are more opportunities for children to have a role in the meeting. The flow is less business-like and more easy-going. There are more optional roles.

INFORMAL FAMILY COUNCIL ROLES

- The **Leader's** role is the same as described earlier.
- The **Recorder** writes brainstormed ideas and decisions the family makes. The Recorder does not, however, have to write and present minutes. Notes, agendas, and decisions from the meeting are filed in the family council notebook for future reference.
- The **Ice-breaker** and **Anchor** roles are the same as described earlier.
- **Additional, optional roles:**
 - The **Topic Discussion Leader** is the same as described earlier.
 - The **Snack Planner** decides what the snack will be and makes it prior to the meeting. Young children can choose a snack and parents can help them prepare it. Snack preparation can also be a family activity.
 - The **Game Planner** decides a fun family activity, such as a game or recreational activity. This person could decide an outing or the whole family could make decisions about outings and this person decides a fun activity only for the meeting. Be creative; don't just select board games. You can use some of the games listed in the "Bedtime Routines" section of the Cooperation Toolset, at the end of this chapter, or make up some of your own.
 - The **Entertainment Leader** picks a song, poem, story, or other form of entertainment for the family council. This could include playing a piece on a musical instrument or organizing siblings to do a play.
 - The **Lesson Planner** shares a lesson that would benefit the whole family. This could be a religious or value lesson, a summary of something learned in school, or teaching the family a new skill.

INFORMAL COUNCIL AGENDA

1. The Ice-breaker leads a compliment activity or other exercise to bring out positive feelings between family members.
2. The Recorder lists any issues left unresolved last time. Discuss and resolve these first.
3. The Leader asks if there are any issues, problems, or decisions the family would like to discuss. The family can decide whether they want preplanned or impromptu topics. (The order of the remaining items can be switched.)
4. The Lesson Planner reads a book or leads an activity that teaches a positive family value. Families with older children can discuss a topic, if they choose. Some examples of lesson activities are listed at the end of this chapter.

5. The Game Planner chooses and leads a game or other fun activity.
6. The Entertainment Leader presents or teaches the family a song, story, poem, play, etc.
7. The Snack Planner serves the snack.
8. Decide roles for the next meeting. Each person plans his or her own activity that week.

Choose whatever optional roles and activities *your* family wants. Help everyone feel involved and let each person contribute something. Make sure there is a Leader to keep things on track and a Recorder to write the decisions you make. The rest is up to the family—be creative!

***A Graduate's Example.** When Paul and Carrie took my parenting class, they had four children (the oldest was six) and had conducted "Family Home Evenings²" since their oldest child was two. They introduced me to new ideas for making family councils less rigid, more fun, and just as effective as formal meetings. Here is how they structured their Family Home Evenings:*

Each family member over the age of two had a role or responsibility, even if the parent helped. As children became old enough to participate, they added another role, to make sure everyone had something to contribute to the evening. Children had full responsibility for choosing and planning their activity. (They often took pride in making it a surprise.) Younger children chose an activity and a parent helped the child only as much as necessary. One child always chose the same game to play, but that was okay, because it was her turn to pick a game.

When Paul or Carrie chose the lesson, story, or game, they would sometimes incorporate an issue they were dealing with in the family. For example, they might read a book about sharing, if the kids had been getting into tug-of-wars that week. They would discuss how people feel when others don't share, why we share, and what to do when someone (including you) doesn't want to share. I thought this approach was a great improvement over "We have a problem with people not sharing" as a business agenda item.

This, I thought, is the kind of family council experience everyone needs to have. My kids (three and seven at the time) were bored and resistant to the restrictiveness of our formal family meeting structure. When I included some of these informal ideas, my kids started showing enthusiasm for family councils again.

Emergency Meetings

Emergency meetings may occur only for decisions that absolutely can't wait for the regular family council. During these meetings, *only* discuss and decide the emergency issue. Postpone other topics until the next regular meeting.

If the family can't agree on a decision and some action is needed, parents can make a temporary decision until the family can more fully discuss the matter. If all family members are willing to abide by a majority vote, **this is the only time that voting is allowed.** If parents make the decision, they can prevent power struggles and resentment by saying, "It appears that we're not ready to make a decision on this yet. Something must be done about it right away, so I will consider your opinions and make the decision. We can discuss it more next week."

Be cautious with emergency meetings and decisions. Closely evaluate whether an issue actually needs immediate attention. If the family is pressured to make an unnecessary quick decision, they might later resent it and rebel. Parents need to reserve their "executive decision-making privilege" for *critical* emergency decisions that cannot wait. If parents choose this option, they need to get everyone's agreement to abide by it until the family can resolve their differences. Often, just this suggestion alone will spur those people who have dug in their heels or are on the fence to make a commitment to a solution.

Maintenance Meetings

Hold maintenance meetings periodically, to discuss how everyone feels the family council is going. Is it too negative, too long, or too structured? Is everyone encouraging equal respect for opinions and ideas? Are people listening and speaking respectfully? If the family council seems problematic, schedule a maintenance meeting. If things are going well, plan one at least once a year, just to make sure the family thinks about progress and improvements. As children mature or schedules change, you may need to review some “first meeting” decisions.

GETTING STARTED—THE FIRST FEW MEETINGS

Parents usually present the idea of having family council meetings and get the meetings started. Here are some issues parents want to consider:

- **Arrange the first meeting.** Discuss the idea of having regular family councils with the children. Children must be involved in deciding whether to have family councils; parents should not force the decision. When children understand the value of family councils, they are usually enthusiastic.
- **Introduce family councils to young children.** When children can talk well, they are ready for the experience of family councils. Keep the meetings brief and simple. Usually, participation in one issue per meeting is all we can expect of young children. Allow younger children to float from the meeting to a quiet activity they can do alone. Parents can briefly interact with young children when they “touch base” and involve them in the meeting. They won’t need to misbehave if they feel they belong and aren’t being rejected or ignored. As we continue to meet and children mature, we can move to longer, more formal meetings. Have each child be responsible for one aspect of the family fun time.
- **Involve both parents, if possible.** Both parents must have a clear understanding of the meeting goals and be ready to function as *equals* with each other and the children. They must make a conscious decision to work together. If one parent doesn’t want to attend, the other can conduct meetings that focus on issues and decisions that only affect the members who are present. Do not use any decision to intentionally hurt or inconvenience the absent member—this will only create more resistance. When the spouse sees the benefits of the meetings, he or she may decide to participate.
- **Have some structure to the meetings.** If children resist structured meetings, we can choose a more casual approach. We might say, “Let’s do something together this Sunday. Does anyone have ideas about where we could go?” The family can decide the time, the place, who will make preparations, and so on. Expect the children to carry out the responsibilities they chose. If they forget, do not single them out, criticize, or rescue them. (If we do, they won’t volunteer again!) Let everyone experience the consequences and brainstorm possible solutions. Our goal is to teach teamwork and reliance on each other, not to play “supervisor.”

As family members learn to cooperate, we can informally begin to introduce problems or other family decisions. As they become used to working through problems and planning family fun, raise the idea of establishing more formal meetings so decisions can be made in one session each week.

- **Start with those who are willing to attend.** Some family members may not be ready to discuss matters in a group setting, but you don’t have to abandon the idea. You can still hold family councils if most family members agree to attend. Those who do not attend the early meetings may decide to attend later, when they see the advantages.

Family councils include parents, children, and anyone else who lives with the family and would be affected by decisions about the daily life of the family. Always leave the “door open” and make it clear that everyone is welcome, but not pressured, to attend family councils.

- **Schedule the first meeting.** During the first meeting, begin planning your format. The first family council needs to be a short one. It's a good idea to have only one item of business at this meeting and plan an outing or fun activity for after the meeting. Later meetings can be longer and follow an agenda. Spend your first few meetings making the following decisions. Start with number one and try to get through number four during the first few meetings, if you can. You can discuss other decisions later.

Decisions to Make ☆☆☆☆

1. **When to meet.** If you discuss nothing else the first meeting, try to decide this. Don't use busy schedules as excuses not to have regular family councils. It is usually possible to find some half-hour period when everyone can come. If mealtime is the only time available, have your meal first, clear the table, and then meet.
2. **How often to meet.** A family council is like any other commitment, such as a new exercise regime or going to religious services. If you make an excuse or exception even once, it's hard to get back into the habit again. Get a commitment from everyone to schedule around this time. Schedule around children's responsibilities and commitments that cannot be changed.

Hold family councils *once a week*, rather than once or twice a month or as needed. This helps prevent the council from seeming like a gripe session. Also, families can discuss issues before they become full-blown problems.

Some parents object to the idea of weekly or regular meetings. “We don't need them,” they say, “We discuss things like this all the time.” It's great if you talk regularly to your children, but councils can take these discussions to much deeper, meaningful levels.

3. **Where to meet.** Sitting at a cleared table is conducive to staying on task for formal problem solving. Sitting informally in a living room is more appropriate for an informal format. Writing, however, will be difficult. Try to find a setting where everyone is at an equal eye level. If parents sit at the head of the table or in a chair that implies an authority position, it is a nonverbal way of displaying superiority. Instead, set an atmosphere of equality.

A Personal Story. Chris' fifth grade class held weekly class meetings. When the class was deciding where to meet, they were concerned that Todd, who was wheelchair-bound, would feel different, because his wheelchair was higher than the classroom chairs. The class decided to find another room to hold their class meetings so Todd would feel like an equal participant. It took them several weeks of touring the school building to find just the right setting, but they did. Such consideration for Todd's need was a beautiful illustration of being sensitive to every member's needs during the meeting, even if only one member has a special need.

4. **How long to meet.** Plan the amount of time you will reserve for family councils. Unless you plan to spend a whole evening full of many fun activities, don't let meetings run longer than 45–60 minutes with older children. Limit the time to about 10 minutes, but no longer than 20–30 minutes, when young children are involved. Start and end on time and stay focused. This shows respect for everyone's time schedules.

5. **What to discuss.** People are always welcome to share news, feelings, problems, concerns, and decisions. They don't have to request input or problem solving. Lessons, topics, finances, chores, and allowances may also be regular topics. (Don't discuss these or other big parent issues until you've had a few meetings to discuss children's issues. Otherwise, family councils will seem like forums only for parents to get what they want.) You'll need to decide how to handle your agenda. Post it throughout the week? In what order will the family discuss issues? Use first-come-first-serve order or based it on priority and urgency? (Priority could be a sticky issue. Younger children's issues are just as important to them as older children's. Parents' issues are not always more important than children's.)
Issues that effect the entire family are appropriate issues to discuss. Individual issues can only be brought up by the individual involved. Use one-on-one problem solving in private, first. If the two of you get stuck, you can offer the family council as a resource for additional ideas. It is the child's decision, though, whether to bring the issue before the whole family.
Never handle individual discipline in a family council in front of other family members; it's humiliating. General discussions about consequences for certain rule violations are appropriate to discuss, as are setting up the rules, since this is *revealing* discipline.
6. **Choose a format: informal or formal.** Review the different formats and use problem solving to decide which activities you want the family council to have.
7. **Roles.** Decide which roles you will have in your meeting. Try to make sure everyone has something to contribute at each meeting. Decide whether people will volunteer for roles each week or if there will be a regular rotation schedule. If people volunteer, make sure everyone has an equal chance to have each role so they can develop a variety of skills.

FAMILY COUNCILS USE ALL THE TOOLS

To have effective family councils, we need to use *all* the tools we've learned, especially the communication and problem-solving skills. Establish basic ground rules for discussions that will model and teach others how to communicate respectfully and result in win/win solutions to problems and decisions that need to be made.

Prevention Toolbox

- Use the *Self-Esteem Toolset* to begin *every* council meeting in an encouraging way.
- Use the balanced leadership styles in the *Foundation-Building Toolset* to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- Use the *Universal Blueprint* to identify who has a problem and use the tools and formulas we've learned to resolve the problem.
- Use the *Cooperation Toolset* to involve everyone in decisions and the tasks to carry them out.
- Use the *Independence Toolset* to teach skills, especially the communication and decision-making skills. (The other toolsets listed below are not in the PASRR order we learned them, but from least-used to most-used.)

Clear Communication Toolset

The ground rules for expressing concerns in family councils: “Express yourself respectfully—no name-calling or blaming allowed. If someone has a concern, complaint, or idea, describe the problem and how you feel about it. Speak for yourself, without blaming or criticizing anyone else.”

Use "I"-messages:

- *Concerns*: "I am (feeling) that I . . ." or "I'd like it if . . ." Not, "You make me feel . . ." or "You should . . ."
- *Complaints*: "I've seen (describe the problem, with no names)" or "Sometimes (describe the problem) happens." Not, "You always . . ."
- *Ideas*: "I think we could . . ." or "Can we . . .?" Not, "We should . . ." or "We have to . . ."

When someone violates these rules, suggest a better way to say it or summarize the statement, without the blame.

- ▶ "Could you try wording that without blaming Susan? Try saying, 'When (describe behavior without blame) happens, I feel ____.'"
 - ▶ "Can you *describe* how you feel, without calling names or labeling?"

This strategy prevents a discussion from becoming a heated argument and teaches family members to express themselves respectfully. You need to be careful to word *your* concerns respectfully, too. Don't fall into these power play traps:

- *Nagging*: "Remember, the meeting is at six o'clock." Instead, make sure the time is clear and then show respect by not reminding.
- *Criticizing*: "You didn't . . ." or "No one does their chores on time unless I remind them." Instead, "I feel frustrated when chores aren't finished on time or without reminders."
- *Threatening*: "Everyone in this house needs to pull his weight or there's going to be no social privileges!" Instead, talk less when revealing discipline and follow through with few words. "Everyone knows their responsibilities. These need to be met before we play or do something social." Then simply follow through on the consequence if people break agreements.
- *Lecturing*: "If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times . . ." Instead, ask open-ended questions, "What is our agreement about ____? Is there a problem with that time? Is there something you could do to help remind yourself?"
- *Probing*: Listen and allow the child to initiate conversation. "Chad, how was your week? Did anything happen that you'd like to share with the family?"

F-A-X Listening Toolset

The ground rules for family council discussions: "When someone is speaking, everyone listens with respect without interrupting. We can summarize what the person is saying to make sure we understand, but we need to wait until the person is finished before giving our opinion."

Everyone's opinions and feelings are okay. When anyone expresses a feeling or complaint, model and teach the listening tools. This is especially important when children complain about parents' actions. Here is an example of unhelpful and helpful responses to such a complaint:

Toby: "I don't think it's fair that you make me go to Uncle Henry's. It's so boring. All he does is tell war stories and watch TV. I'd have more fun getting a root canal!"

Unhelpful response: "Watch it, buddy! That's my brother you're talking about. He's lucky he didn't get killed in the war! If you weren't such a spoiled brat, you'd appreciate all the wisdom and good things he's given you. The least you could do is go and quit groaning about it." A response like this will surely make Toby defensive and increase his resentment toward his parent and uncle.

Helpful response: “I can understand how you would rather do something that is more interesting to you.” Wait for a response and reflect more, if needed, before you respectfully express your side of the issue. Then move into problem solving, “Visiting family is important to me. Even if I don’t have a lot in common with Uncle Henry, I still love him and want him to know we care. It’s important to me—and to him—that you visit with us. Can you think of a way that visits with Uncle Henry could be more interesting for you?”

When people complain, let them know you heard and understand them. Shift the focus to solutions, instead of rehashing complaints or the problem. Identify the issue for both parties. Toby’s issue is boredom and the parent’s issue is spending time with a valued, though admittedly difficult, relative. The F-A-X process can help parents and children reach win/win solutions.

Problem-Solving Toolset

CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING ☆☆☆☆

When problems arise or decisions need to be made, the goal is to reach win/win solutions and agreements everyone agrees with. This is called **consensus decision-making**. The word “consensus” means “to think together.”

Never use voting as a regular form of decision-making. Every vote has winners and losers—and the losers often try to sabotage the decision.

Some people think consensus means “everyone states opinions and Mom and Dad decide.” If everyone agrees to abide by the parents’ decision, it’s a consensus decision. True consensus, however, considers all opinions.

Consensus decision-making involves several elements:

- Giving everyone an equal chance to be heard, contribute ideas, and influence decisions.
- Working together to reach an agreement to which everyone is willing to commit (even if some members agree not to get their way).
- Everyone understands the decision and is prepared to support it.

Consensus decision-making doesn’t mean parents have to go along with whatever the children want. ***Parents can present bottom-line limits for decisions and then focus the rest of the discussion on the choices within those boundaries.*** This can prevent families from going around in circles and splitting into “sides” of a decision.

It’s rare, but sometimes families need to discuss an issue for several meetings before they reach a consensus decision. (Each member thinks of ideas and gathers information between meetings.) While consensus decisions clearly take more time and effort than autocratic decision-making, they are much more effective and lasting. Everyone gets a say in the decision and at least part of the decision meets their needs. There is also little to no resistance or rebellion and those involved in the process usually follow through with few reminders.

To reach consensus decisions, follow the basic problem-solving steps we have learned and reviewed for different types of problems. Since the problem is a “family” problem, everyone can have the opportunity to give input at each step.

1. DEFINE AND SUMMARIZE THE PROBLEM

Ask the person with the complaint or issue to explain it. This step uses I-messages, reflective listening, open-ended questions, and summarizing the problem. Each person has an opportunity to voice a view

of the problem and understand what others are feeling and thinking. Here are some tips to remember and pitfalls to avoid at this step:

Give everyone a chance to share feelings. Acknowledge each person's opinion and summarize the problem after everyone has spoken. The Leader or Recorder can say, "So let me get this straight, Mom is really frustrated about (describe the problem). It bothers me a little bit. It's not a problem at all for Joanne, and Bobby is also frustrated and would like the situation to improve. Do I have that right? Does everyone understand *what* the problem is and how each person feels? Okay, then let's discuss what we can *do* about the problem." This leads the family into creative brainstorming.

Limit griping. Reflect the complainer's feelings and summarize the problem. Then shift the focus to solutions, "So what do you think we could *do* about that?"

2. EXPLORE ALTERNATIVES THROUGH BRAINSTORMING

Get children involved in coming up with solutions. Ask them for their suggestions first. Parents can add ideas only if necessary. The more involved the children are in offering solutions, the more likely they will carry them out.

Allow all ideas, no matter how silly. Silly ideas might contain the seed of a workable solution. The Recorder simply lists all the ideas until no one thinks of further ideas.

Ideas don't "belong" to anybody. Once someone offers a suggestion, it becomes a general idea. When people take agreeing or disagreeing with an idea personally, remind them that this is just one idea, not "(name)'s idea." Similarly, just because someone suggests an idea doesn't mean he or she necessarily wants that idea to be the final solution.

Do not permit criticism of ideas. If someone disagrees with an idea or criticizes it, offer a reminder, "All we are doing right now is sharing any idea at all that comes to mind. We are simply listing them; we aren't agreeing to use them. Everyone will have a chance to say how they feel about each idea when we have thought of every possibility."

3. EVALUATE THE SUGGESTED IDEAS

Give everyone a chance to express their opinions about each idea. Express opinions respectfully, "I am concerned about doing that because . . ." or "That idea could work if we did it this way . . ." Do not allow any comments such as "That idea's stupid." Ask *what*, specifically, they don't like about the idea.

Emphasize the difference between details and matters of principle. If someone wants to discard an idea because of a serious concern, this opinion might carry more weight than disagreeing about a detail. You can usually work out details later, in the planning stage, if the family can agree on a general idea.

Deal with minority issues. If some people are unwilling to agree to an option most of the family wants, listen to their feelings and summarize their points of agreement and disagreement. Ask, "What would you need to hear or feel to consider this option?"

Pinpoint the real issues. Don't get sidetracked by personal issues. If people simply want their way, encourage them to think about the entire family's needs, "I'm sure we *all* would like to have our own way. It would be more helpful, though, if we can look for ways we can meet *everyone's* needs. How can we resolve ___ in a way we can *all* agree?"

4. CHOOSE AN AGREEABLE SOLUTION

Mix and match parts of ideas. Modify or combine ideas to reach a solution agreeable to everyone.

Take a survey to see where everyone stands on a possible solution. “Could we all agree to . . . ?” Although some people might have concerns about the plan, you might be surprised to find they are still willing to agree to it. Compromise by having a trial period or conditional agreement, “I’d be willing to agree if . . .” If the rest of the group agrees to the conditions, move on.

Plan the details. Decide who will do what, how it will be done, and when it needs to be completed. Get everyone’s input, ideas, and agreement on the plan. When appropriate, discuss the effect of broken agreements. Have children offer suggestions, rather than revealing discipline as the parent. If children suggest it and agree to it, they will be more likely to follow through and discipline themselves.

If you can’t reach a consensus decision, you have several options:

- **Table the discussion.** Sometimes people need more time to think about ideas or their willingness to agree to the decision. Ask everyone to think of ideas or research information before the next meeting.
- **Make a decision smaller.** Go with the part of the agreement everyone has agreed on and work out the rest of the details at the next meeting.
- **Make a temporary decision, until a more final decision can be reached.** You can probably get people to agree to a temporary conditional decision. The decision might not be final, but it can be a starting place.
- **Agree to a trial period,** with the understanding that the solution can be brought up for discussion later, if it doesn’t work.
- **If an urgent decision and action are needed,** you can get a consensus decision for the parent to make an “executive decision.” (See the “Emergency Meeting” section for cautions and guidelines on this option.)

5. MAKE A COMMITMENT AND SET A TIME TO EVALUATE IT

Get firm commitments. Summarize the agreement and ask if everyone agrees to it. If you get “I’ll try,” as a response, seek a more firm commitment. “I’ll try” is not a commitment; it gives you an ‘out’ if you don’t feel like making the effort. We need a commitment from everyone. ‘Yes’ or ‘no’?”

Record the decision. Have the Recorder write down the final agreement and the details of the plan and file it in the family council notebook. If you make a schedule (e.g., for homework, chores, or allowances) or calendar, post it where everyone can see it.

Evaluate the plan. The minimum time to try out a plan is one week, until the next family council. (You might want to talk with younger children within a couple of days.) Then, ask everyone how the plan is working. Are there unexpected problems? Do you need to make adjustments? If all has gone well, agree to review the plan in several months.

The process of making decisions and solving problems is just as important as reaching a final decision. It may seem the prize we gain from problem solving is a win/win solution. The real prizes, though, are the valuable life skills everyone learns.

FAMILY COUNCIL TROUBLE-SHOOTING GUIDE ☆☆☆☆

Establishing new patterns of communicating and making decisions takes time. Developing and teaching cooperative leadership skills takes time and effort. It is natural and expected that difficulties will

arise and “sour” meetings will occasionally occur. Don’t let this discourage you or cause you to give up on family councils. Instead, review your guidelines again and check this troubleshooting guide. For each suggestion, ask yourself, “Did we do this?”

Always start positively and end positively. Make a “positive sandwich,” where problems and more serious discussions are sandwiched between an uplifting beginning and a fun ending.

Keep a balanced, cooperative atmosphere.

- Don’t use family councils as a court session or lecture forum. Resentment and resistance will only intensify.
- Avoid an “us and them” attitude, with parents on one side and children on the other, especially when there is an only child.
- Allow everyone to share opinions and feelings without criticism—no teasing or putdowns.
- Make sure children’s issues get equal attention during the meetings. If they don’t offer opinions or ideas, make a point to ask them for input. When children feel their input is important, they start voluntarily participating more.

Keep out the welcome mat. Welcome everyone at your family councils, even if they have never attended or don’t feel like talking. They can simply sit and observe. If someone chooses not to attend a meeting or is unwilling to agree to a decision, they may be affected by decisions made in their absence. These are natural consequences, not intentional punishments for not attending. Make it clear that the decision isn’t written in stone and their input is valued and welcome. “We tried to consider what your feelings and opinions might be, but we couldn’t check with you first. If you’d like to come to the next family council, we’d be happy to include any ideas you have.”

Never throw a decision “in someone’s face” as a revengeful payback for not attending or participating in a decision.

***A Personal Story.** By the time my parents learned about family meetings, my brother and I were teenagers. Our relationship was so bitter, it was difficult to sit in the same room, let alone respect each others’ ideas! Family meetings didn’t last long in our family, because not much information was available on troubleshooting. One family decision was handled so poorly I swore never to attend a meeting again.*

Someone suggested growing a vegetable garden. I was allergic to fresh fruits and vegetables and hated weeding. Everyone else thought the garden idea was great, but I didn’t want to participate. “Why should I?” I thought, “I can’t even eat what we would grow!” The others tried to sway me to their side, but I wasn’t willing to make an honest commitment to the project. They decided to go ahead with the garden anyway, without me. I agreed to this. My parents revealed the consequence for my nonparticipation: “If you don’t help grow the garden, you can’t eat anything we grow.” That was fine with me.

Months passed and one night, during dinner, my mother served some juicy, red, sliced, home-grown tomatoes. I couldn’t eat raw tomatoes and didn’t plan to try these. She laid them in front of me and said, “Since you didn’t help grow these, you can’t eat any.” Her tone of voice hit me like she was rubbing the tomatoes in my face! I was hurt! Not because I couldn’t eat the tomatoes, but because they were used as revengeful punishment! I was so hurt by this incident that I withdrew from the family meetings and never attended again.

*Take my advice: start family councils when your kids are young or after you learn how to do them helpfully. Keep reviewing information about constructive family councils. If someone’s feelings get hurt, deal with them. Apologize and make amends. Most of all, **never** use family council decisions to punish those who do not attend or participate.*

Focus on goals and solutions, rather than griping about why things aren't working.

Stay on task. The Leader's job is to see to it that everyone sticks to the point. Set time limits on discussions and refocus the discussion if it wanders from the topic. Break larger problems into smaller parts, focusing on one part at a time. A large family can break into smaller groups to discuss them.

Redirect disruptive behavior. Sometimes a child's personality, energy level, or misbehavior goals can disrupt the family council. Handle misbehavior as you would any other time. Getting a child involved in the task at hand is the most effective way to **P**revent misbehavior in a family council. When problems arise, briefly **A**cknowledge feelings, **S**et limits, and try to **R**edirect the behavior. We can also **R**eveal children's choices; they can participate in the group in a helpful way or they can leave the meeting. They will have to abide by any decisions made in their absence, but are welcome to return to the council any time, when they are willing to conduct themselves appropriately. *Only eject participants from the meeting as a last resort.*

Reserve certain types of decisions for parents. Meeting together does not mean that the parents must always do whatever the children decide. Basic questions of health and well-being are parental responsibilities and the decisions are sometimes theirs alone to make. (Remember our first exercise in the "Parenting Styles" section about a father receiving a promotion that would involve moving?) If a decision has to be made without family input, discuss how everyone *feels* about the decision and how the decision can be made easier for the children. Involve the children in making the necessary plans to put the decision into action.

All decisions hold firm until the next family council. If people complain about decisions between meetings, simply reply, "That was a family decision, so the whole family needs to be involved in any changes. Put it on the agenda so you can bring it up again at the next family council."

CONCLUSION

It may take several weeks or months to establish a comfortable, smooth family council routine. Be patient with your progress and concentrate on what is going well. Don't expect your meetings to be thrilling every week. Expect to run into difficulties. Review the summary sheet before meetings (to prevent problems) and after sour council experiences (to rebuild trust and avoid similar mistakes in the future.) Learn from your mistakes and use what you learn to teach the whole family new skills that will prevent and resolve such pitfalls in the future.

Don't expect solutions to last forever; that's unrealistic. Choose an idea and try it for a week to see how it works. If it doesn't work, put the problem back on the agenda and try again, and again. Remember the long-range benefits you are working toward. They are important enough to weather any short-term frustrations and failures, which are simply part of the growth and learning process.

AGENDA/ACTIVITY IDEA LISTS

You can use the "Problem-Solving Worksheet" in the Problem-Solving Toolset for one-on-one, sibling, parent/child, *and* family council problem solving. Use the following lists to get started and feel free to add, change, or modify them to suit your needs. Get the creative juices flowing!

Lesson Activities^{3,4}

Everyone is special. This activity teaches a lesson and builds teamwork at the same time. The family *bakes a cake* as the activity and snack. As you make the cake, each family member takes an

ingredient or job to do to prepare the cake. As each ingredient is added, talk about how special and important it is. The ingredients are good all by themselves, but unless they are mixed together, you can't call it a cake. While the cake cooks, discuss how each person in the family is important and adds special gifts the family appreciates. A family is where you can be yourself without worry of criticism. These bonds are created when we serve and help each other. Discuss what the cake would be like if we left out any of the ingredients. Is any one ingredient more important than another? How does this apply to our family?

Secret admirer. Write each family member's name on a slip of paper and fold it. Each person chooses a slip (but not one with their own name). Without revealing the name of the person, have family members tell of an incident in which another family member showed love. "I'm thinking about someone who did _____ to show me love. Have the other family members guess the loving family member.

Help someone outside your family. For young children, choose a service that is small and simple, writing a note or drawing a picture for someone who is sick or for a grandparent far away.

Discussing death. (Use a glove with your hand to describe physical death.) "Suppose my hand represents your spirit. It is alive. It can move by itself. Suppose this glove represents your physical body. A glove cannot move by itself. But when the spirit enters it (put your hand in the glove and move it around), the physical body can move. As we live on earth, each of us is a spirit clothed in a physical body. Someday because of old age, disease, or accident, the spirit will leave the physical body. We then say the person has died (take off the glove and lay it down). So, death is a separation of the spirit from the physical body. Death is not, however, an end of life, for the spirit continues to live (show that your hand still moves)."

FAMILY COUNCIL OPENING ICE-BREAKERS

One new thing I learned this week is . . .

One nice thing someone in the family did for me this week is . . .

(Family member) is special to our family because . . .

One funny thing that happened to me this week is . . .

A good habit I have is . . .

Something I read in the paper or heard this week and how I felt about it is . . .

A good clean joke I heard this week is . . .

What really makes me happy is . . .

The three most important things in my life are . . .

Something (family member) did for me this week that I never thanked him/her for is . . .

Something I do well is . . .

My biggest accomplishment is . . .

Something I did that helped someone this week is . . .

Something I did that took courage is . . .

The funniest thing I've done is . . .

One way I've improved myself is . . .

A good habit I have is . . .

FAMILY COUNCIL DISCUSSION TOPICS

A bad habit I have and what I can do about it

A time when it was the hardest/easiest for me to be honest

The hardest decision I ever made

The worst decision I ever made and what I learned from it

Something I want to do, but am afraid to do. What's the worst that could happen? What's the best?

The hardest thing to deal with at school/work

Expectations of authority figures, dealing with authority

Being accepted by others (cliqués)

Rules, how to deal with unfair rules

Different opinions, how to disagree respectfully

Male/female relationships

What is your "purpose" in life? How do you know?

Drugs/alcohol/smoking, sex and dating (consider parents *and* teens who are attending parties)

Personal/career goals

Dealing with conflicts

Attention—who gets it and why

Honesty and openness with tact

AGENDA (at least do the starred items)

★ ICEBREAKER/COMPLIMENTS:

MINUTES:

OLD BUSINESS:

★ NEW BUSINESS:

FINANCES/ALLOWANCES:

★ FAMILY CALENDAR:

LESSON/STORY:

TOPIC DISCUSSION:

ROLES FOR NEXT COUNCIL:

★ CLOSING "ANCHOR" ACTIVITY:

ENTERTAINMENT:

GAME/FAMILY ACTIVITY:

TREAT:

SUMMARY SHEET

FAMILY COUNCIL TOOLSET

- The purpose of family councils is to have regularly scheduled time together to build a sense of unity, make decisions, resolve problems, and teach values and life skills. Council meetings are useful for any family, school, or group.
- **Every member has a role.** ☆☆☆☆
Necessary roles are the Leader, Recorder, Ice Breaker, and Anchor.
Optional roles are the Discussion Topic Leader and Snack, Game, Entertainment, or Lesson Planner.
- **Start with those who are willing to attend;** include anyone who lives with the family. Let everyone know they are welcome to attend, when they are ready. Never punish someone for not attending.
- **Meet regularly,** not just to discuss problems. Don't skip meetings because you are too busy. ☆☆☆☆
- **Start positive and end positive.** ☆☆☆☆ Keep an atmosphere of equality.
- **Start and end on time** and set time limits on discussions.
- **Discuss issues that affect the entire family.** Individuals can ask for family input on personal issues. *Never* handle individual discipline in a family council.
- **Hold maintenance meetings** to discuss how councils are going.

Ground rules:

- Express yourself respectfully, with no name-calling or blaming.
- Everyone's opinions and feelings are okay; listen with respect.
- Limit griping; turn the complaint into a suggestion.
- Focus on goals and solutions, not problems. Don't get side-tracked.
- Get children involved in suggesting solutions. Allow all ideas.
- Give everyone an equal chance to share feelings and ideas.
- Reach win/win solutions everyone agrees with. Don't vote.
- If you can't reach a consensus, table the issue until you reach a final decision or agree on a trial period. Reserve "executive decision-making privilege" for critical emergency decisions.
- All decisions hold firm until the next family council.

PRACTICE EXERCISES

A. Identify and Correct Mistakes. In each situation, the family makes one or more mistakes in setting up or conducting a family council. For each situation, (a) identify the mistake and (b) offer suggestions to correct or prevent it.

1. Holly says she can come to family councils only every second and fourth Sunday of the month, because she has softball practice on the first and third Sundays. The family decides to meet only the second and fourth weeks so everyone can attend.
2. In the Hoskins family, meetings are attended by Dad, Mom, Hannah, and Seth. Grandpa Hoskins, who has lived in the back bedroom for the last four years, is not invited.
3. The McCann family has decided not to hold family councils because one of their three children, Trevor, said he wouldn't attend. He thinks the idea is stupid.
4. In the Metzger family, meetings are held in Dad's study. He sits behind his desk and everyone else pulls in chairs from the kitchen.
5. Joel is Chairperson this week. On every question he asks for a vote, counts the "yeas" and "nays," and lets the majority rule.
6. Alyssa's parents are divorced, and she lives with her mother and her two brothers. The four of them have regular family councils. This week, Alyssa complains to her mother about her weekend visits with her father. She says she spends most of her time cleaning up his apartment and washing several days' worth of dirty dishes. Mother says, "Well, bring it up at our family council tomorrow."
7. Brandon feels that a decision made at a family council about his bedtime was unfair. He pleads with Mom, who says it's okay for him to stay up until 10:00, instead of 9:00 as the family decided. (There are *two* mistakes here, did you find them both?)
8. Mr. and Mrs. Bowling ask the kids, "Where do you want to go for vacation this year?" The children (ages 15, 10, and 5) want to go to the beach. The parents want to go to the mountains. Since Mother and Dad are paying for the vacation, they decide that the family will go to the mountains anyway, since they dislike the beach.

B. Get Unstuck. The following two families are "stuck." For each situation, answer the following questions:

- a. How is this family getting stuck in their problem solving?
 - b. How could they have approached the decision differently?
 - c. How can they get unstuck and reach a consensus (win/win) decision?
1. Mr. and Mrs. Evans have three children: Jared, 10, Casey, 9, and Kara, 6. During their first family council, they tried to plan a family outing. Jared and Kara decide they want to go to a movie, but Casey wants to go to a baseball game. Mother would prefer the movie. Father would like to go to the game, but is willing to go to the movie if the rest of the family would rather go there. Casey refuses to go along with the rest of the group.
 2. Travis, 8, is a homebody. He'd always rather stay home than go somewhere. Saturday is when the family meets to plan something fun together. Everyone, except Travis, wants to go to the movies. Although Travis says he likes this movie, today he insists that he wants to stay home. All he wants to do is play with his friends and video games. Travis' parents want the family to stay together. Travis is too young to leave him home alone and they don't want to pay a sitter to watch him.

Activity for the Week

Hold a family council this week.

1. Decide which roles you would like members to choose. The necessary roles are already checked.

- Chairperson
- Recorder
- Ice-breaker
- Anchor-person

- Song selector
- Game planner
- Lesson planner
- Snack planner

2. Select items for your agenda. The necessary agenda items are already checked.

- Compliments
- Reading of the minutes
- Progress on decisions made
- New decisions/problems
- Finances/Allowances

- Calendar planning
- Lesson/topic discussion
- Roles for next council meeting
- Closing Activity
- Snack/song/poem/story

Detailed Answers

A. Identify and Correct Mistakes.

1. Holly's softball practice is a *responsibility* and she doesn't have practice *all day*. Instead of canceling the council meeting, the family can find a day and time convenient for everyone.
2. The Hoskins family needs to welcome Grandpa Hoskins, since he lives with them.
3. The McCann family can hold family councils, even if Trevor chooses not to attend. They can let Trevor know he is always welcome. They do not punish Trevor for not attending or exclude him from any family activities they plan, just because he didn't help plan them. If he doesn't like the idea, they can invite him to attend the council and offer his ideas.
4. Mr. Metzger is exerting his authority position, nonverbally, by sitting behind his desk. The family needs to meet in neutral territory, where everyone is on an equal level.
5. Effective family councils do not use voting. Joel can guide the family through the problem-solving process, until they reach a consensus decision.
6. Alyssa's problem is with her father, who lives elsewhere, so this problem is not appropriate to resolve at the family council. If Alyssa's mother is not bitter and can remain objective and helpful, she can do one-on-one problem solving with Alyssa. If she cannot remain objective, she can offer Alyssa's siblings as resources. If they visit together, they could suggest holding family councils at Dad's. Or the kids could hold their own "sibling" council to brainstorm ideas.
7. Brandon's bed time is not an appropriate issue to discuss at a family council. If general bedtimes are discussed as they apply to all the children, then it might be appropriate to discuss. In that case, any agreement must hold at least until the next family council. Mom does not have the authority or right to cancel or change a decision the entire family made.
8. Mr. and Mrs. Bowling asked, "Where do you want to go for vacation this year?" This implies the possibilities are endless. If this is truly the choice, they need to work on a win/win decision. They could choose someplace where there are mountains *and* beach, for example. If they are only willing to go to the mountains, they can present the decision as, "This year, we are going to go on vacation to the mountains. What would you like to do while we are there?"

B. Get Unstuck

1. The Evans family has tried to tackle too much for their *first* family council. Instead of deciding *what* to do for their family activity, they might want to start by deciding *how* they will make the decision and what kinds of activities are appropriate. For example, does the activity have to be with the entire family? Can pairs break up and have independent "dates"? Then they could brainstorm ideas for *possible* activities. Could each person have a turn selecting an activity? How do they set priorities? A movie shows for a month at a time, but that particular sporting event might

feature a favorite team only on that date. Under those circumstances, would the sporting event be considered a priority? If the family is split between two options, can there be a conditional agreement that the next activity will be the other choice?

2. Travis is trying to exert his independence. If he feels his opinions are not considered in a decision, he may choose to start a power struggle. Travis' parents have several options that could prevent this. If their bottom line is that Saturdays are for *family* activities, they can point out that Travis can usually stay home other times. They may want to take turns picking a family activity, so Travis gets his way sometimes. They could shift the focus of the choices, "You do have to go, but you don't have to participate." Usually, children come around once they are in the car and see the activity. The parents could also provide one last option, "You may choose to stay home, but *you* will need to pay for a sitter out of your money." Even if he chooses this option, he will be unlikely to follow through with it. If Travis complains or tries to spoil the fun for everyone else, he is trying to get revenge for losing a power struggle or vote. To prevent this, his parents want to acknowledge his disappointment at having to do something he doesn't want to do. They can redirect his behavior by letting him choose some of the activities they do there.

WHAT'S NEXT?

It's always difficult for busy families to set aside time for family councils. Make a commitment to your family and children's future by scheduling weekly family councils. We all can use the practice and the long-term benefits are well worth our efforts.

Chapter 15, "Three C's: Consistency, Criticism, and Confidence," is the final stop on our tour of *The Parent's Toolshop*. We now have all the tools we need to build a healthy family and reach our long-term parenting goals. We have learned many new ideas and made great strides in our growth as parents. Now, our challenge is to nurture ourselves and maintain our progress.

We've dispelled many parenting myths in *The Parent's Toolshop*. The last chapter corrects the last few myths by explaining the true definition of consistency (the first "C"). The second "C" stands for criticism—how to respond (or not respond) so criticism and unhelpful advice do not deter us from our long-term parenting goals. This chapter also gives us a final booster shot of confidence (the third "C") by offering suggestions for self-nurturing, so we continue our upward path of growth. As we end our tour of *The Parent's Toolshop*, we reflect on all we've learned and how much we've grown—and look ahead, to what the future holds for us as we continue our mission of building a healthy family.

REFERENCES

1. For more information about conducting "formal" family meetings, read: *Positive Discipline*, by Jane Nelsen (Ballantine, 1987; Revised Edition, 1996); *S.T.E.P.: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting* (American Guidance Service, 1982) and *The NextSTEP* (American Guidance Service, 1987), by Donald Dinkmeyer, Gary McKay, Donald Dinkmeyer Jr., James S. Dinkmeyer, and Joyce L. McKay; and *Active Parenting*, by Michael Popkin (Harper Row, 1987).
2. "Family Home Evening" is a practice of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).
3. Lesson activity ideas are used with the permission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, from their Family Home Meeting publication, which accompanies their video, "*Family First*" (1992). For a free video, call 1-888-537-8433.
4. Another terrific (and inexpensive) resource for family council activities is *Families Creating a Circle of Peace*, published by The Institute for Peace and Justice (1996). To order a copy, contact the Families Against Violence Advocacy Network at 4144 Lindell Blvd., #408, St. Louis, MO 63108 or you can call 314-533-4445 or send e-mail to ppjn@aol.com.