

*Family Connections: Building Strong Families and Responsible Children through a Weekly Family Meeting*

# FAMILY CONNECTIONS:

Building Strong Families and  
Responsible Children through  
a Weekly Family Meeting



THE KITCHEN TABLE CEO™  
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## PREFACE

I originally wrote this book eight years ago. My how time flies!! But what's really cool is that over the past 8 years I've seen a lot of what I say in this book come true. Especially the part where I maintain that your family meeting will change as your family changes. This past year my mother had an accident that has landed her in a wheelchair. She could no longer live alone so she came to live with our family. One of my older daughters moved back in so she could help me care for her. So in recent weeks my family meeting has taken on a whole new dimension as we divvy up care giving responsibilities in addition to rides to tennis practice, carpool schedules and who's making what for dinner on which night of the week! It's proven to be such a blessing to have a system in place to help us easily connect and handle all the new activities and responsibilities in our lives.

Even though I'm 'updating and revising' this after eight years, I'm leaving most of the original content. This information is timeless and so I've only made slight tweaks here and there. I hope this book will work for your family the way it has for mine for the past 25 years – from 4 little ones underfoot, to now a teenager, an adult daughter and an aging parent! The Family Meeting will work if you'll do the work to put it in place. Now enjoy! And let me know how it goes!

Big love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kim".

Kim

## INTRODUCTION

The information I'm about to share with you is near and dear to my heart. I believe every busy family, especially when mom's a working mom, needs a family meeting!

It is my heart-felt belief that families can run smoothly and lovingly when a little extra effort is made to ensure communication that allows every voice to be heard and all desires to be voiced. I'll also be straight with you - I'm all about raising responsible kids who have to take charge of their own lives. So if you're one of those moms that needs to be needed – ask for your money back NOW! This book is not for you.

This book is about taking the burden of responsibility and putting it where I believe it belongs – with each person carrying their own weight. That said, the Family Meeting is also a beautiful time for parents to educate, inspire and promote their beliefs and family values - WITHOUT the kids knowing it! The tone that you set at this meeting will convey to your children beliefs, ideas, and issues that are important to you - without your children even being aware that you're doing it. It's just all a part of the play I call, the Family Meeting.

## Chapter 1: My Story

### How the Family Meeting Was Born

I had four children in five years. For a few years, I felt like I was running my own daycare - but without pay! When all the kids were little it was a really crazy time in my life, and even though for many of those years I didn't work, I found there was just so much juggling to get everyone where they needed to be, when they needed to be there and with what they needed to have.

So.....my husband and I got in the habit of 'meeting' every Sunday night to go over our schedules. In the beginning, sometimes we'd actually hire a babysitter to come over so we could have an extra set of hands during that time – or someone to take whoever needed special attention out to play on their own. (Pretty much a given someone's going to need special attention with 4 kids under the age of 8!) In these early days we didn't realize our little weekly 'schedule review' would work its way into a family meeting - with everyone involved, a set agenda and us teaching our children about responsibility, money management and what it means to be a part of a family!

### How it's Grown and Evolved

Every family's 'Family Meeting' is going to look different - because every family is different. Your family meeting is also going to grow and change over the years as your family grows and changes. The needs and scheduling for children who aren't in school yet is going to be quite different from those of children in school and not yet driving, to those in school and sports and working (even if they have their own car!)

So from its' beginning almost 25 years ago with four small ones underfoot - to how our family looks today - 2 in college, one a competitive athlete with practices EVERY DAY (and not yet driving!) and one just beginning first grade - this concept will work for you. It will work not only with logistics and scheduling and organizing, but done well - it will become a time your family plans for and looks forward to. It will become a time of bonding and connection - a time for learning and growing together. It will become the hub of the family's communication with each other!



## Its' Impact on my Family

You know, we've done the Family Meeting for so long that my kids can't really remember a time when we didn't do it. I can't remember back to when we didn't have a formal family meeting, but I can tell you what it's come to mean to all of us as we've grown. The first 'formal' family meetings I can remember were when the kids were from about age 7 or 8 to age 3. They'd come with their piggy banks, and we'd have the chore charts with gold stars. Bob and I would have our daytimers and we'd usually have a special box of toys that could only be played with at the family meeting. (More on that in Chapter 10!) Of course, Bob and I did most of the talking, planning, scheduling then and the kids were mainly there to be a part of it. But what it did do, was create a habit for our family. A habit of giving everyone a voice, giving everyone a chance to talk about good things in their lives and a habit of connecting with one another at a special time that was reserved just for our family. And that I believe is one of the biggest benefits of the family meeting - in a subtle way it sends the message to your children that this is a special time for them. It clearly shows that family is a priority and you're going to schedule it in, just like you schedule in work, meetings, haircuts and dentist appointments. It tells them that they're a priority - and their desires and choices are going to be heard and honored. So if your children are older now, as (most of) mine are, or if you're starting this with a household of little ones - know that the biggest impact is going to come from having a special 'family' time that will not only keep you organized and less stressed, but will bring you together and keep you strong as a unit!

## **Chapter 2: Why A Family Meeting?**

### **It Reduces Your Stress**

The biggest tangible benefit to a consistent weekly family meeting is that there will be so many less surprises and unexpected things that will come up during the week – and that will allow your stress level to go way down! There’s nothing worse than heading out the door to go to work, and have your 12 year old say, “Oh yeah. I forgot to tell you, I need twelve 1”x 1” magnets, dry ice and a ride to Chris’s after school so we can work on our science project!” (true story) I can’t promise that things won’t come up, but as your family gravitates to a family meeting, these things will happen less often. And if something like this does come up, because all the other details are handled (like what’s for dinner and who’s cooking it!), they’ll be easier to manage.

### **It Teaches Responsibility**

You’ll have to decide the stand you’re going to take, but in our family - everyone is responsible for bringing their own concerns, schedules, and needs to the meeting for themselves. This may be a gradual process if you’re just starting out or you have very young ones, but eventually, one of the greatest benefits is that kids become responsible for their own lives!

In our family, it’s generally known that if you didn’t bring it up at the family meeting - it’s not going to get much attention. For example, our family meeting is on Sunday night. Let’s say that Tuesday one of your kids needs a ride to someone’s house or specific materials for a school project. In fact, let’s say it’s the aforementioned ride to Chris’ house, magnets and dry ice. Well, my son knew, because he forgot to bring those needs to the family meeting Sunday, that it’s not going to get a whole lot of attention on Monday evening. My kids know real quick my first response is going to be, “Why didn’t you tell me at the family meeting?” And “I forgot” doesn’t get much sympathy. See, it only takes kids showing up at school one or two times without the supplies they need, (or missing a get together at a friends), before they remember those things next time. It all depends upon what you choose for your children - do you want them to be responsible for their schedules, or do you want them to believe that every time they forget, there will be someone there to bail them out!

In the true story I mentioned above, I chose to NOT disrupt our entire evening, go to Home Depot to buy magnets and to the grocery store to buy dry ice. I gave my son the opportunity to arrange his own ride to a friend’s house. (Obviously, his friend had to get home from school – why

not ride with him?) And guess what? They worked on their project as best they could without the supplies, they got together later in the week (after he'd made arrangements to get the needed supplies - without sending our household into a tailspin) and the science project went off without a hitch. As my son grows and matures, he's going to learn that he must prepare in advance, plan his schedule, be organized - and not expect others to re-arrange their schedule every time he forgets to do the above! I feel that's a much greater lesson than learning if magnetic pull is affected by temperature! (Afterall, which lesson do you think will serve him best in life?)

## Everyone is Heard

The Family Meeting is going to empower the children in your household - so be prepared! They're going to get time when everyone in the family listens to them and what they say is heard. And I can promise you - sometimes it's not going to be what you want to hear! At one of our most recent family meetings, my kids all told me that they didn't think I was helping in the kitchen enough. They hadn't seen me load and unload the dishwasher all week. And they were right. It wasn't what I wanted to hear, but it was true.

So we got to have a great family discussion on what it takes to do a really big project (I was focused on writing this book and finishing my print book - so I was spending less time in the kitchen!) And then we came to a solution that felt good to everyone - I would unload the dishwasher two mornings that next week after someone else had loaded the night before. When given the opportunity, they will find their voice!

## Time to Connect

If you're part of an office that has a weekly staff meeting, or belong to an organization that has a monthly meeting, you know how vital those meetings are in keeping your team connected and keeping everyone on the same page. It's the time you can make sure everyone's headed in the right direction, review where you've been, and keep the company or organizations mission in the forefront – well, it's the same with the family meeting.

The family meeting is a time where you touch base with everyone in the family together. I often get 10 to 15 minutes with this child in the car and then 10 to 15 minutes with that one while we do homework, but for all of us to be together – that's a treat. And unlike mealtimes together, the focus here is simply our family, us sharing together, us meeting to make our family a better family. We all take pride in it. We know it's part of what makes us a strong family.

The connection at these meetings is also a deep one – or at least there is the potential for it to grow into that. We've had family meetings where we've gotten into discussions that go from politics, to drinking and driving to electric cars to pesticides in foods to....you name it! The family

meeting is set up to create an atmosphere of sharing and it just becomes a close, connected time for the family. I can't wait for you to experience it! (Please send me an email and let me know how it goes. I love hearing about your successes!)

## Share Your Values

Values is a word I have some pre-conceived issues around – it reminds me of something stuffy, nose-in-the-air, moral high-ground issues. That's not what I'm talking about when I say 'values' here. The family meeting is simply a time for you to look at the things that you value in your life – and introduce them to your children.

For example, I feel in my heart that gratitude is the key to a happy and fulfilled life. So we keep our family meetings completely positive and focused on the good – the things we're grateful for. I don't believe in going back in the past and drudging it up and keeping it alive here in the present moment. So we don't do a lot of, "Well last week you...." or "A few weeks ago I made dinner two nights....." It's all about right now and what we can do to make our family better, stronger, happier and more connected. Sometimes things do come up that we need to address, but we do that in a positive way and go forward looking for the good that came out of that situation.

The Family Meeting is also a time to get totally creative in sharing what's important to you. As you go through this book, you'll see in the Closing that there's a time for you to create some type of 'family ritual.' It can be as simple as putting your hands in the center and shouting "Go family." Or it can include a variety of things. My husband is into 'green' and so he likes to share something he's discovered that can keep us more 'green' as a family. (Did you know that even if something is turned off, but it's still plugged in, it draws electricity? So if you unplug things at night, you save more electricity? A tidbit brought to you by a Hodous family meeting!) See what I mean about creativity? What's important to you, what it is you value, you can share with your family. It's fun, it's easy and it's quick. (I don't advise a 30 minute dissertation on the benefit of solar panels or renewable energy sources..... but a 30-second juicy tidbit is awesome!)

## **Chapter 3: Scheduling the Family Meeting**

### **Consistency is the Key**

When you find the time that works for you, then **STICK TO IT!** Especially when you first begin, the Universe is going to test you. So you'll pick a time, and then all kinds of things are going to pop up to sidetrack you! I suggest a time when everyone in the family can be there, and when you'll have at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted time. No cell phones are allowed at the family meeting.

And if the house phone rings, no one answers. No TV's with back ground noise. No laptops. Just us, and as few distractions as possible. We have our meetings on Sunday nights and that works really well for us. Everyone is home and kind-of 'gearing up' for the week ahead anyway. We've also had success with Monday nights, depending upon the season and the practice schedule of kids' sports. The great thing about Sunday nights is that there's usually nothing scheduled. Once your family is in the habit of this, everyone will look forward to it. It's a win-win for everyone, so **STICK TO IT.** One week without a meeting, and the momentum begins to unravel.

I also believe consistency in the way you run your meeting will make it more successful. We always have our meeting in the same room, at the same time, and we follow the same agenda. (see the Appendix for a sample agenda) Everyone knows what to expect. This really isn't the time for surprises or to spring something totally new on the family. You want this to be a comfortable, easy time of coming together

The great Peter Drucker said, "What gets managed, gets done." It applies to so many things in life, and it applies here. You are going to have to monitor and manage the family meeting in the beginning, and once you begin to see all the benefits of how much more smoothly your household runs, it'll all be worth it!

### **Rescheduling**

If for some reason you do have to miss a meeting, plan on having it the very next night if possible. The longer you go without that 'touchpoint' for your family, the easier it is for things to slip through the cracks and your lives to get disconnected from one another. Remember, this is about minimizing the stress in your life and keeping your family connected. Reschedule!

## Emergency Meetings

We reserve these for very rare occasions, but there are times when an emergency meeting is needed. What's really great though, is that when you do need an emergency meeting, it's just so easy. We had to have one this summer when a trip we'd planned to Canada fell apart and we had to reschedule the whole thing to happen in Santa Barbara. I just put out the word, "Emergency family meeting right now." and everyone came running to the living room within seconds. Because we've got that consistency and know the format, it happened without a hitch. (and so did the trip to Santa Barbara!)

## Chapter 4: The First Family Meeting

### Getting the Buy-In

Obviously, depending upon the ages of your children – some will just show up because you tell them to, and some may need to be persuaded it's a good idea! It can be a pretty exciting first meeting if you tell them they'll be leaving with cash. (More on this in chapter 9.) If your kids are younger, at the first meeting, after you unveil the family calendar, let them choose straws to see who gets to be the first one to tape it to the refrigerator. Just find ways to make it fun. Anything you can turn into a game will keep them interested!

We choose not to do food at our family meeting – we just wanted to keep the focus on the business at hand. But for that first meeting – some special 'treat' may be called for. The biggest thing to know is that *your* attitude will determine *their* attitude. If you're excited when you tell them about it, they'll get excited. If you act like it's a necessary chore, they'll feel like it's a necessary chore! So get excited – and they will too!

### Establish the Time/Place

Whatever the time and place – keep it consistent. Our meeting starts at 7:00, so I'm always there a few minutes early. I light a candle. I fluff the pillows. I straighten the magazines on the coffee table. Just like I get the conference room set up before the staff meeting, I get the living room set up before the family meeting. We choose not to have it around a table; it just felt less formal that way. It seemed more relaxed and like a gab session.

I get the Family Calendar and have a pen and my shopping list ready. I turn the phone off when the meeting starts and the TV goes off too. This is our time for our family. Once the time and place have been set, I suggest NOT changing it. It becomes too difficult if you're having to pick a new time each week to have the meeting. My kids know our family meeting is 7:00 pm Sunday evening, and they know if they show up they'll get dinners they want in the upcoming week, they'll get their money for the week and they'll get connected to the rest of the family. You may have to experiment with the place – we just easily gravitated to the living room. There is no TV in there, so that distraction wasn't an option. There was seating for everyone. It worked. Find a place that's comfy for your family and then make that the spot!

## Setting the Agenda

In this book I'll review the six components that make a successful family meeting. That doesn't mean that there can't be seven, or that 5 wouldn't do the job okay either. It's just that each component has been successfully tried and tested and has proven to be a worthy component of the family meeting. Leave one component out – and all of a sudden the responsibility issue comes to be tested or the money management lessons get left in the dust. For starters, I suggest you embrace these six and go from there.

As I mentioned earlier, I've done this with 4 kids under the age of 10 and I've done it with teenagers who are driving - and these six components seem to have weathered the test! So I recommend you start out using the six areas I suggest and go from there. There's an agenda in the Appendix to keep you on track!

## What it is NOT!

The family meeting is not the time to discipline or call kids out on what they're not doing right. You do that and you're not going to have anyone wanting to attend! This is the time when you keep things positive and upbeat.

That doesn't mean issues aren't going to come up that need to be dealt with, but keep the dealing with them in a positive manner. If something really unpleasant comes up, suggest that you deal with that issue with the child it pertains to after the meeting – or better yet, the next day. Everything won't always be roses, but it can be handled in a positive manner and as a learning experience.

## Keep Your Commitments

Through experience I've found as soon as you declare something in life, the Universe will send you a challenge. So...know that when you commit to a family meeting, something will come up to disrupt it. That's okay! You just keep your commitments to the family meeting and watch the Universe part the heaven and seas to assist you in having the best family meetings ever!



## Chapter 5: Start it Out RIGHT

### Set the Tone (literally)

Research shows that sound associations are very powerful. When my first daughter was born and I was reading all the parenting books, I remember one said to have a bedtime ritual and do the same things in the same order and have a sound associated with all of it. So I bought one of those tie-on- the-crib toys you could pull the string and it would play a lullaby (remember this was 20 years ago – I'm sure they're all digital now!) And I still have that pull string bear! I used it at bedtime for all my kids and it worked like magic. So one of the things I do to start our meeting is play a chime I bought at a local gift shop. You can ring a bell. You could put on a song - "We are Family" by Sister Sledge would be a good choice. Find some sound that will signal to everyone the meeting is starting.

### Start with a Brag

We start every family meeting with a 'brag.' This is some sort of good thing you've done, something you're grateful for or something you're happy about in your life. This gives everyone in the family a chance to:

- participate and become engaged right off the bat
- share something positive so the tone is set that this is not a gripe session
- have a voice and contribute

Everyone can come up with something good – even a two-year old. So starting off round robin style with everyone sharing, sets the tone that everyone will participate in this meeting. It's a great way to ensure that no one will just sit there and listen for the first 15 minutes before joining in. Everyone participates from the very start.

It also sets the tone for a positive, upbeat meeting. I don't know if you've ever attended a staff meeting that starts off with a problem and the boss upset – well my experience is that it's straight downhill from there! It's so easy to keep a meeting positive if it starts off positive. It sets the tone that you're not here to complain or gripe, but you're here to support each other in the good things in life!

Finally, when you start off with everyone sharing something good, you give everyone a voice. In a subtle way, you say to each member of your family, 'I choose to hear what you have to say. It

matters to me.' And when they know they have a voice, and they'll be heard – they're much more willing to share.

Starting with a brag grew out of my belief that gratitude is key in living a life you love. Again, it's kind of a sneaky way for me to keep the focus on the positive and share one of the things I 'value' with my family – gratitude.

## Chapter 6: Operation Co-Ordination

### The Family Calendar

Our family calendar has a permanent place on the front of our refrigerator. If you don't have a family calendar, I recommend you get one. This is a separate calendar from one you use for yourself personally. You can find one online to print or buy one from the Dollar Tree. It doesn't need to be anything fancy. The family calendar is a great tool for keeping all family appointments, schedules and events in one place. The basis of the family calendar is that this is the template for planning out the week. Here are the 5 items I find essential to add to the Family Calendar.

1) School Calendar: The first thing I do is enter the school schedule on the family calendar. Put in the holidays, in-service days, parent-teacher conferences and days off. Then if you're not sure if the kids have a day off, you can check there rather than having to call the school or go online and find the school calendar.

2) Sports Schedules: Next, I put in the kids' sports schedules. We like to attend the football games, so the home games go on the calendar. My son plays on the tennis team so both home and away games go on the calendar. My 6 year old is in soccer, so that goes on. At the beginning of each sports season, add those events onto the calendar.

3) Recurring Events: I teach yoga on Tuesdays – that goes on. My little one has Tae Kwon Do on Mondays – that goes on. My husband has a board meeting the first Tuesday of every month – that goes on. I think you get the idea. Any events that affect the family routine go on the family calendar. (Obviously, I don't put my noon luncheons or business appointments here – only those events that occur in the evening and affect the family schedule.)

4) Carpool Schedules: I am a huge proponent of carpooling. We live exactly 1.2 miles from my son's elementary school....and we carpool. (I'll try not to get on my soapbox here, but I do have to put in a plug for carpooling.) There are so many benefits to carpooling:

A) YOUR TIME! Even though we live close to my son's school, it still saves me a good 15 minutes to not get him loaded in the car, get into the traffic around the school, drop him off, get out of the traffic around his school and then get back into the normal route I take to get to the office. I carpool with 2 other families, so I drive every 3rd week. If you take 15 minutes times two weeks, that's 2 ½ hours every three weeks I save in time. And that's on the close carpool. I have one to the Jr. High that's about 3 miles away and one to the tennis academy which is 45 minutes away. Fifteen minutes may not sound like a lot but when you

multiply it out through the school year, I save over 28 hours by participating in a carpool to a school we could walk to! What could a carpool save you?

B) CONSERVES ENERGY! Why should we have 3 cars trekking down over the hill to school when one can do it? We've got to begin to really create ways to conserve our natural resources. I won't bore you again with the math, but 2 less cars going 1.2 miles (and back) times 40 weeks of school....

C) EASE OF EXIT! The year before we started carpooling, my neighbor's son had 22 tardies! The year we carpooled – none! When kids (and you!) know someone else is counting on you for a ride, they're ready and on time.

D) BUILDS COMMUNITY! When the kids in your neighborhood ride together, it builds a sense of community. It gives them a connection to one another and creates a bond. In this world of technology we can connect with a million people with the click of a mouse on Facebook, but we don't take the time to say "Hi" to our neighbors. Carpooling builds that connection with your neighbors.

E) TEACHES RESPONSIBILITY: I make my kids responsible for reporting any changes to the carpool. So if they're going to go to school early, are going to be absent or are running late – they have to make the call. Yes – even my six-year-old. I dial. He talks. I want to empower them to be responsible to the carpool community they belong to. Whew! Enough said. I do love to carpool!

5) Travel Plans: Finally, I add any traveling for myself or my husband. It gives the kids a place to look if they want to know if we're going to be gone. And again, it gives my husband and I a quick reference to know if we have a week coming up when one of us will be 'single parenting.'

So those are the items I get on the family calendar, and then that calendar comes to the meeting to get 'beefed up' for the week!

And then it goes right back on the fridge for everyone to access!

## Events

The Family Calendar is brought to the meeting and we add to it any events coming up that week. Events like curriculum night at school or a special meeting at church. Now that we've got the 'bones' of our family activities on the family calendar, we beef it up for the week ahead. We add in those special meetings.

Again, because I'm big on responsibility, I make the kids, as much as is reasonably possible, be responsible for letting us know about those meetings. If there's something important to them that they want us there for – they're usually pretty good about bringing it to the meeting. When the kids were younger, we had a hanging file folder stand on the kitchen counter. Each child had their

own file. Then if a paper came home and it mentioned an upcoming event at school, we'd circle it and they'd throw it in their file. If a bulletin from church mentioned an upcoming event, we'd circle it and throw it in someone's file. Then at the family meeting, they each brought their papers with them and we added their events to the family calendar. It was a fun time to discuss that upcoming event and it made that child feel important.

This is also a great time to catch things like a change in the school schedule (finals week or Parent-Teacher conferences). It's when you can arrange who's getting whom to the upcoming dental appointments or doctor visits for physicals. It allows you to prepare for all the items on the family's schedule in the upcoming week. And dovetails right into rides.....

## Rides

I know there are Transportation Directors for large corporations who don't have much more responsibility than most moms! MOM.....the consummate taxi driver. I love my mini-van (well, not really, but it does the job)! Let's face it, with kids' activities and rides to and from school (when did taking the bus become like the 'worst thing ever?') – we can spend a good hour or more every day in the car. And that's not even mentioning the commute to work! You know how I feel about carpools – they're a mom's best friend as far as I'm concerned. And lots of trips can be minimized if time is taken to plan things out.

At this point in the family meeting, we look at the calendar and the schedule – and we plan 'rides' – how everyone is going to get to where they're going. It's great when one of your kids can drive. (That 16<sup>th</sup> birthday has always been a huge celebration at our house!) I count on my older kids a lot to help with rides for the younger ones. If you don't have anyone driving yet and this all falls to you, you can at least plan and prepare for it. (And get some good CD's to listen to. I've got all kinds of uplifting and inspiring CD's and then at least my time without kids in the car isn't wasted or spent on the phone!)

## 'Needs'

My favorite part of the meeting! This is the catch-all for the things your kids 'need' from you. A \$15 check for a class supply fee, items for a project at school, face wash because they're out of it, a t-shirt with their name on it for gym. Whatever!

In the introduction I told the story of my son with his science project. This is where that would fit. Now granted, there are times that something is going to come up during the week that will need to be handled right then. And if you've got the majority of needs dealt with before they occur, those ones that come up on the fly are much easier to handle.

You may be thinking right now that your kids will never plan ahead that far. You'll be surprised. My kids LOVE it that they've got a designated time to bring to the table all the things they 'need' for their lives to run smoothly. Build it and they will come. Make them responsible for their own 'needs' and they will bring them!

## Chapter 7: Feeding the Masses

Be it good or bad, feeding the family usually falls to us – the moms. We literally do get to bring home the bacon – and then fry it up in a pan.

My mom was a great cook. I swear she could take a can of tuna, some ketchup and a bag of frozen corn and make a gourmet meal out of it. It doesn't come that easy to me. However, I do come from a long lineage of women that love to cook, and although I don't 'love' it – it's important to me that I feed my family healthy, nutritious home-cooked meals.

So.....I share the responsibility as much as possible, I plan for meals so their preparation is smooth and easy, and I set the intention that we enjoy those meals together.

There are three major issues around 'feeding the masses' that we handle at the family meeting:

### Weekly Menu: Requests/Who's cooking

If there's one thing I can't tolerate it's one of my children showing up at the table and stating, "I don't like that. What else is there?" (I can promise you, there's nothing else that this momma's making!)

So the family meeting is where they can bring meal requests. Be it tacos, chicken parmesan, spaghetti, stuffed baked potatoes, or shrimp scampi – this is where they bring it up.

Then we look at the upcoming week and decide what we're having each night. And we usually fall into some pretty easy patterns. Tuesdays I teach a yoga class, so Tuesday is always a crock pot meal. The best cookbook I've found for crockpots (or slow cookers as they call them now!) is [Fix-It and Forget-It Cookbook](#) by Dawn Ranck and Phyllis Good. Someone wondering what to get you for Christmas or Mother's Day? Ask for it. It's my Bible for crock pot cooking.

The great thing about crock pot meals is that they're super easy and usually just involve cans of things or minimal chopping. It is so worth it to know your family is eating a healthy meal and it's ALL READY when you walk in the door.

Next, we decide who's cooking each night. Tuesday is easy. I either allow an extra 15 minutes in the morning or my daughter, who's at the community college and doesn't have class until 10 AM on Tuesday, agrees to do it. Thursday's I get home from the office late – so my other daughter makes spaghetti. Monday's are my husband's day off, so often he'll volunteer to do dinner that night. It's usually something frozen or something on the grill – and that's all right by me!

So you can see, by bringing it up and talking about it as a family, you can share the job of preparing meals with the whole family. We remember the story of the Little Red Hen. Everyone is eating, everyone can help. You may be surprised at the level of responsibility your family will rise to as you begin to give them the opportunity.

And if your family is young, and all the cooking falls to you, at least you'll know what you're having and you'll have in your cupboards all the ingredients you need to make it. (See the next point below!)

## The Shopping List

As we're having our meeting and 'needs' are coming up, they go on the shopping list. Once we've decided what we're having for dinner that week, I make out my shopping list. Then I have my list of everything I need for the entire weeks meals. This is also when I take requests for items for their lunches and snack items. (I sensor as well! Just because they ask doesn't mean they get it.)

Some tricks for shopping – you can go late at night. The grocery stores are empty and it's a great time to get it done in peace and quiet. Another option is to throw a cooler in your car and go on your lunch hour or right after work before you pick up the kids. Or – delegate it to a teenager who can drive or to your husband.

One of the most powerful things I've done is put two \$100 bills in my daughters hand and send her off to grocery shop. She learned how expensive things are, how time consuming it is, how easy it is to forget something, how many trips it takes to get all the groceries in the house if no one is helping, and the effort involved to get them all put away!

I rarely grocery shop anymore. I make the list and the kids do it. It is a powerful lesson in what it takes to feed a family. And they learn to make good choices about food. They'll get excited when something on the list is for sale and they'll deliberate over to buy the 'store' brand or the 'name' brand. So many lessons they'll learn! I think you'll find your kids will really like it given the chance.

And don't forget about husband's either. This is a task at which they can be super helpful. Whether it's kids or husbands, the first time or two, you may need to go with them because they'll be lots of questions about size and brand and labels and expiration dates, etc. On my facebook page [www.facebook.com/thekitchentableceo](http://www.facebook.com/thekitchentableceo), I've got a great video and worksheet on Delegating like a Pro CEO. Check it out if delegating is tough for you.

If there's not a child or a spouse who can help, then consider one of my options above (late at night or during a lunch hour). That's how I did it for many, many years (16 to be exact ☺)

Having what you need to cook, and knowing what you're going to be cooking are half the battle as far as I'm concerned. And you can handle both of those right there at the Family Meeting.

## Eating Together as a Family

Maybe I'm old-fashioned. Maybe I harken back to a day when life was simpler and families sat around the table and talked at the end of the day. Whatever the reason, that's what I choose for my family – at least a few times a week.

One of the great things about the Family Meeting is that you've talked about and planned for meals, so you're going to be cooking food they want to eat! (Step one in getting them to the table!) But the other subtle factor is that you've put it in their heads that this is important and given it some weight.

We actually talk about what time we're going to eat because it varies on the night. On Tuesday we eat early because I'm leaving the house at 6:00 to go teach. On Thursday's we eat at 6:00 because that's when practices finish and everyone's home.

We have a family tradition of nacho chips on Friday nights. On Friday nights, we don't just eat together as a family, we usually have about 4 or 5 extras as our nachos have become legendary!

Like everything in life, if something is important to you, and you put your attention on it – you'll create it. It's important to me that we eat together as a family as often as possible. If that's important to you, then begin to hold that vision, plan for it – and you'll create it.



## Chapter 8: Chores

Did you have chores as a kid? I did. (And I didn't live on a farm – I always think of chores as things like milking the cows or bringing in the eggs!) I did stuff like vacuum and wash the dishes. And I believe it has served me well. Your kids will never again live in a household where they have no responsibility for helping. I don't believe you do them any favors by letting them live in your household without having to do anything to help.

I'm all about kids being kids – I'm not talking about mopping the floors and polishing the silver. (Although if that's what you choose, that's okay too!) I'm talking about simple, daily jobs that only take from 5 to 15 minutes to do.

Besides, I choose to have a life. If I'm running around picking up everyone's dirty laundry, cooking, cleaning, and exhausting myself – I'm not getting to have a life. (At least not a very fun one!) I'm not getting to pursue the passions that excite me. So I choose to share the responsibilities of living in a community we call family.

### Reframe: Joy Jobs

In my household, everyone has JOY JOBS. We choose not to call them chores because that just sounds negative. And besides, Joy Jobs has a nice ring to it. We let the kids choose their own joy jobs, and then we hold them to it. Appendix A has sample joy job charts for varying number of kids and it has an Age Appropriate Joy Job chart. I give my kids a list to choose from, and then they pick what they want.

There are certain things that have to be assigned every night – like loading/unloading the dishwasher. So they have to trade off on that and make sure it's covered every night. There are also things that have to happen on a certain night. Wednesday nights the trash always has to go out because it gets picked up on Thursdays. So we have some parameters, but we give them lots of freedom in choosing who does what.

### Setting the Schedule: Keep it Positive

We have chosen to keep the assignment and completion of joy jobs very positive and we don't get into a lot of consequences. I've already mentioned my affinity for Peter Drucker quote, "What gets managed, gets done." I've added my own twist which is: "What gets monitored, gets managed. What gets managed, gets done." So you have to start by monitoring, and once you do: it'll get done. Especially as you start this, you'll need to monitor and remind. We have our joy jobs chart on the refrigerator (right beside the family calendar) and I just tied a big purple marker to the

fridge door on a piece of string. Then the kids are responsible for putting a big star or heart or smiley face on their square once they've completed their job.

So here's what will happen - they'll start monitoring one another! It becomes real obvious to everyone if someone isn't doing their fair share because there'll be big, empty white space in someone's column. Trust me, your kids don't want to be doing their jobs and having someone else just skate by. (Just like that wouldn't fly with you at work if you were doing your job and there was someone who wasn't pulling their weight!)

Your job is to monitor in the beginning (I'd say it usually takes around 6 weeks for kids to get in the flow of this). And then watch it become seamless and a source of pride for your kids, and a huge reduction in stress for you!

## Review

We always bring the previous weeks chart to the Family Meeting and take a look at it. We don't scold or discipline if there is someone that didn't do their jobs. The kids will do that amongst themselves. We don't let them get mean or judgmental about it. We just have open and honest discussion about how everyone is feeling about it. It's a great time for kids to discover things about themselves. One week, one of my daughters discovered that she'd signed up to do the kitchen when she had a night class and that just didn't work in her schedule. She planned better the next week. Another time, my 16-year-old son realized he ALWAYS took out the trash and he wanted someone else to do it. He was feeling resentful. He learned not to feel sorry for himself, but just to ask for help and let someone else take a turn. Powerful lessons about time management, responsibility and setting boundaries!

## Chapter 9: Money Management

In the past, my husband and I haven't always been the best money managers. In fact, when we were first married, we were downright bad at it! I certainly wish I'd been given the opportunity, and some education, on how to manage money as a kid. I think it would have shortened my learning curve as an adult tremendously!

The Family Meeting is the perfect place to hand out the weekly stipend of cash, and at the same time teach your kids something about money.

Note: This is one of the last things you do. If your kids know this is the time and place they get their weekly dose of green stuff, they'll show up! In our household, if you're not at the Family Meeting, you don't get any money. It's just how we've chosen to do it. (If you don't go to work on payday, you're not going to get your check either.) Life lessons! Remember, I told you I'd give you a bullet proof way of getting kids to show up for the meeting! Here it is!

### Handing Out Cash

So kids are going to get a certain amount of your money. Instead of you budgeting for them, why not let them do that themselves? If they can learn it now, they won't be racking up credit card bills when they turn 19 or be leveraged in debt by the time they're 25!

Our kids get a set amount of money – it's called their Necessities money. It's to cover everything – lunches, weekend activities, gas (for the ones that drive), eating out and any other incidentals that come up throughout the week. Then they're not coming to us for \$20 for lunch on Monday, \$10 for gas on Wednesday and \$15 to go to the movies on the weekend – you get the idea. You've probably handled the same requests!

You'll have to figure out what you're going to cover and what you're not with the money you hand out – and then stick to it. And just like everything in life, as soon as you affirm that's what you're going to do, something will come up for which they'll need extra money. Decide going in where you're going to stand. Neither way is right or wrong, just decide and then stick to it.

Just so you know, we have no set standard in deciding the amount for each child. We sit down individually, talk about their expenses and set a reasonable budget. (In the next section, I'm going to get into the areas we have them budget for and so we allow extra money for those areas as well.) One of our daughters has celiac and cannot have any wheat or gluten. 90% of her food has to come from the health food store and fast food options are severely limited. She goes to the community college and it's difficult for her to eat in the cafeteria there. Obviously, her 'food'

budget is going to be higher than for our son who eats at the junior high cafeteria every day. We don't ask our 6 year old to budget his lunch money. We put that on his account at school. Each child's situation is different and the amount given to each one is different. Every family is going to have a different barometer they're comfortable setting when it comes to money for kids. Find your range and then experiment to see where things settle. Each of our children receives a different amount because each child's circumstances and what they're expected to pay for varies.

Let me give you an example. My 16-year-old is a sophomore in high school and has tennis 4 nights a week after school, and private lessons on the weekend. His tennis academy is 45 minutes away. So these are the things we figured out for him:

GAS – about one tank or \$50/week (we did all the mileage calculations to figure out what he needs to get to school and back 5x a week and for the days he drives to tennis)

LUNCHES – we give him \$5/day for lunch - \$25/week

SHOES – he goes through a pair of 'tennis' shoes about every 6 weeks. The shoes are around \$100/pair. We give him \$15/week for shoes. Then he's responsible for budgeting that money so when he needs them, he can go and buy them.

EXTRA- he's given an 'extra' \$25/week for any incidentals that come up – movie with friends, having to grab a meal on the run because of tennis, a protractor for school, etc. This is also to help cover the 'budgeting' he'll do that I discuss in the next section.

So at the Family Meeting he is given \$115, plus what he earned for Joy Jobs. Then we're done for the week. This gives the responsibility of managing that money to him, not us. It's money we'd be doling out anyway, it's just that now he's learning to budget and manage it.

That probably sounds like a lot of money to hand over to a 16-year-old on a weekly basis. It is! AND, I want my children to get used to handling large sums of money RESPONSIBLY for the rest of their lives.

You'll probably have to do some experimenting to find the perfect threshold. Just let them know, from the start, that it's a work in progress and you'll eventually find the perfect amount that works and is fair.

In addition to their necessities money, they have the money from their Joy Jobs. And just to be clear, they also have 'jobs' around the house they are NOT paid for. Our feeling is that there are some ways you contribute around the house because you're a part of the family. You don't get paid for that; that's part of your responsibility as a family member.

## Budgeting

Over the years my husband and I have probably taken 5 or 6 courses in money management and I can't even count the number of books we've read on the subject. The course that seems to have had the most lasting impact however, is Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace. We've used his system for over five years and in that time, we've gone from over \$15,000 in credit card debt and paying college tuition in installments to having no debt, vacations paid for before they're even taken and the money for tuition sitting in an account when it comes due.

Dave's suggestions for children are pretty simple. They get a 'commission' for the jobs they do. We've just called ours their 'joy job money' for so long it seemed silly to change the name. The underlying sentiment is the same – it's the money they get paid for the work they do.

Dave then has them 'budget' into three categories: saving, spending and giving. So after our kids are given their weekly necessities money and their 'joy jobs' money – they put 5% in saving and 5% in giving and the rest is to be budgeted.

We have them fill out their deposit slip right there at the Family Meeting. When it's reasonably possible, I have them go with me to make the deposit at the bank. Sometimes, I just bring them home their deposit slip. They keep their 'giving' money in an envelope and either take that to church to 'give' or use it for some other worthy cause they choose.

The bottom line is this. We wanted our kids to be responsible for budgeting their money. We wanted them to start NOW to learn to spend wisely, save for what they wanted, use their money to have fun and to learn to always give back a portion to the world.

It can be done in 100 different ways. This is a way that works for us, and I think if you tried it, it would work for you. Just find SOMETHING, ANYTHING that works, and start to make your kids responsible for their own money instead of you always doing it for them. So our kids bring their bank books and envelopes to the family meeting, and we hand out money and talk about what's working and what isn't.....which leads us to the next part.

## Wins/Challenges

Here's where the real learning begins! When everyone is there, discussions take place about what is working, what went well that week, what didn't go so well, etc.

One week our daughter Allie showed up with all of her jars empty. There was something she wanted and so she had 'borrowed' from all her jars and was going to pay it back. It was her first lesson in over-extending herself financially, and she found it was nearly impossible to pay it back! Most of us know that once you get yourself in that hole, it's hard to get out. But what a fabulous way for her to learn it – with less than \$100 invested, her credit not at risk and she wasn't even 17 yet!

Another time, one of our daughters wanted a new winter coat, and it wasn't her year to get one. (When did kids start to think they got a new winter coat every year? We used to get one about every three years, and it was usually replaced with a hand-me-down!) Anyway, she realized if she ate off the dollar menu or stayed at school and had a \$1 slice of pizza, she could save some of her 'lunch' money for a coat and was able to buy it herself, in about 3 weeks. Conversely, on another occasion, the same daughter also spent all her 'lunch' money within a couple of days, and when she learned we weren't going to bail her out, she had to pack her own lunch the rest of the week.

For Christmas last year, the kids were going to go to make a donation to Heifer Project International with their 'give' money. But in early December, Lindsey came home and the single mom that cuts her hair was having to declare bankruptcy and didn't know what she was going to do for her two young daughters for Christmas. So at the Family Meeting Lindsey asked if the other kids wanted to pool their money and 'do' Christmas for these 2 little girls. They all jumped on board. Lindsey found out their sizes and what they wanted and my four incredible children went to the mall with their 'give' money and gave a beautiful Christmas to two little girls that wouldn't have had it otherwise. Beautiful!

My son, the tennis fanatic, is saving his money until he can buy a stringer to string tennis racquets. Once he does, he'll have a viable business and he'll earn money stringing racquets for other guys on the high school team and many of the players he knows through camps and academies in the area. He'll also be able to string his own racquet which used to cost \$35.00 each time.

Need I go on? I could give you at least 20 more examples of profound financial experiences my kids have had because of this part of the Family Meeting, but I think you probably get the idea of how valuable it can become. It's not just handing them money and letting them go. It's a time to teach and educate them about finances, budgeting, saving and spending. (And you'll learn quite a bit yourself along the way!)

## Chapter 10: Wrap It Up

This is one of my favorite parts of the meeting. (Actually I love all parts of this meeting – can you tell?) This is a time where your family builds a ritual. I have seen it take so many various forms – as many forms as there are families. You can close your meeting as simply as by playing the special chime again. You can crank up the music and dance! You can say a prayer. You can Om. You can read scripture, read the Tao, read the Daily Word, read an inspirational story. You can huddle up, put your hands together in the middle and shout, “Go Family!” The varieties are endless, just pick something and bring closure to the meeting.

Before the closing, another option is to add in something special for your family. One woman shared with me that their family was preparing for a trip to France, so at the end of their family meeting, they began to learn French words for their trip. I love it! Make it work for you. I mentioned earlier that my husband is a ‘green’ guy. He chooses each week to share a ‘green’ tip with us or some way we can help the planet and conserve our resources.

I know of families that have read the entire *Little House on the Prairie* Series – a chapter or two per week. If there’s something that’s important to you to share with your family, this is a great time to do it.

My only caution is to not let it get too lengthy. By this point in the meeting you’ve covered a lot of ground, so if you’re going to add in something else, keep it short and fun (if possible!)

## **Chapter 11: Special Circumstances**

### Single Parents

Maybe you're thinking, "Well, this would be great if you had a husband, but I have to do it all on my own." Even more reason to have a weekly touchpoint with your kids! The single parents that I've heard from after implementing the family meeting say it has become invaluable. Because they're often having to cover details that occur when kids are at dad's house – so it becomes extra important that you're organized and plan ahead.

It also gives you the advantage that if something is going to interfere with rides/schedules/events in the upcoming week, you can see if dad can help, and if not, enlist the help of friends and neighbors. Again, any special circumstances you can handle on the front end certainly make for a smoother back end!

Single moms have some of the toughest jobs I know – juggling career and kids – often without much help. A family meeting really reaffirms for your kids that they're important and you're doing everything within your power to take care of their needs. The bonding becomes even more special for single moms and their children. If you're a single parent – I think you'll find this extra valuable!

### Traveling Parents

If your husband travels, or if you travel, the family meeting is going to prove to be an invaluable resource. If you're the one traveling, it will allow you to leave town knowing all the details have been taken care of. You have to figure out all the details anyway – why not have a scheduled time and place for it! If your husband travels, then you can get his help in coordinating all those details before he leaves town.

I know of one family that would have the traveling dad call in and be on the speaker phone for the family meeting. Now that's creativity for you! Depending upon the travel schedule of you and your husband, find a system that works for you. Again, I've often found that for these 'special circumstances' the family meeting is more important than for families when everyone's home all the time!

### Families with Babies

If you're a family with an infant, you might choose to have the family meeting after the baby's asleep. (Assuming, of course, the baby goes to bed reasonably early!) In those early years the main



benefit of the family meeting is going to be the creation of a 'habit' where the family gets together and becomes connected. There won't be a lot of input from the little ones.

When we had little ones under age 4, we had a special box of toys that came out ONLY during the family meeting. What a coveted box of toys that was! We would have everyone participate in the brag, we'd let the little ones play with the special toys, and then we'd put those away when we handed out money and wrapped it up! It's amazing how young they recognize money and get excited about being given some of their own.

My belief is that it's never too early to start a family meeting. So even if it's you, your husband and a baby in the bouncy seat, begin a tradition that will build a strong, connected family and assist you in raising responsible kids!

### Anything Else that You'll Let 'Take you Out of the Game!'

So there'll be some people who get to this point and say, "Yeah, but my situation's different." Everyone's situation is different. Every family is different. You can find the reasons this won't work for you and your family, or you can find the reasons this WILL work for you and your family! Don't let anything take you out of the game. The Family Meeting is a proven, successful tool for connecting your family and helping you raise responsible kids. It's worked for hundreds of families and it will work for yours too! Give it a try!

## Conclusion

There you have it! The very best of what I know about running an effective Family Meeting. I sincerely hope you'll give it a try, and NOT give up if your family isn't on board right away. I've found any change always brings a little resistance. So stick with it and just ride that bumpy wave out to sea! You'll be so glad you did.

Please email me if you have any questions. I'm quite passionate about the benefits of a Family Meeting and would love to help you as you put yours in place.

Now here's to a strong, loving family and kids that are responsible for their own lives and their own money!

Big love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kim". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Big love,".

Appendices:

## Joy Job Ideas

Modify to fit your Family's Needs

### YOUNGER CHILDREN CAN

- Pick up Toys
- Fold Dishtowels and Washcloths
- Match Socks
- Put small items in the garbage
- Give food to pets
- Water indoor plants
- Sweep a deck, patio or porch
- Put forks and spoons away
- Put their own clothes in the drawer
- Sort laundry into color piles
- Use a hand-held vacuum
- Take out Garbage
- Set the table
- Clear the table
- Vacuum an area rug
- Empty the dishwasher
- Put away clean dry dishes
- Water the garden
- Bring in mail / Grocery shop
- Empty recycle bins
- Wipe the bathroom sink
- Clean the inside of the car

### OLDER CHILDREN CAN:

- Clean mirrors
- Clean kitchen counters & sink
- Fold and put away laundry
- Put away groceries
- Pack their own lunch
- Light yard work
- Load the dishwasher
- Clean the bathroom
- Change bed sheets
- Mow the lawn
- Wash dishes by hand
- Wash the car
- Do laundry
- Shovel snow
- Bathe younger children
- Drive younger children
- Clean out the refrigerator
- Make dinner
- Grocery shop
- Take trash cans and recycle bins for pick up
- Sweep sidewalks
- Organize the junk drawer or coat closet, etc

\*Customize this list for things your family needs done. Let the kids help decide!

## Family Meeting Agenda

Date:\_\_\_\_\_ Time:\_\_\_\_\_

- 1) Everyone Give a 'Brag'
  - 2) Operation Co-Ordination: \*get Family Calendar\*
    - Add Extra Events
    - Cover all Rides Needed for the Week
    - Go Over any 'Needs'
  - 3) Feeding the Masses
    - Take Meal Requests
    - Make the Shopping List
    - Discuss Eating Together as a Family
  - 4) Joy Jobs
    - let everybody choose their own
    - review last weeks chart
  - 5) Money Management
    - hand out the CASH!
    - set aside saving and giving
    - discuss wins/challenges from the last week
  - 6) Wrap it Up!
    - create your closing
- \*\*Congratulate yourself on a job well done!



# JOY Jobs

Week of \_\_\_\_\_

MONDAY	
TUESDAY	
WEDNESDAY	
THURSDAY	
FRIDAY	
SATURDAY	
SUNDAY	

# JOY Jobs

Week of \_\_\_\_\_

MONDAY		
TUESDAY		
WEDNESDAY		
THURSDAY		
FRIDAY		
SATURDAY		
SUNDAY		

# JOY Jobs

Week of \_\_\_\_\_

MONDAY			
TUESDAY			
WEDNESDAY			
THURSDAY			
FRIDAY			
SATURDAY			
SUNDAY			



# JOY Jobs

Week of \_\_\_\_\_

MONDAY				
TUESDAY				
WEDNESDAY				
THURSDAY				
FRIDAY				
SATURDAY				
SUNDAY				