

## Educare Approaches to Discipline: The Family Meeting

The theme of this series of articles is an Educare approach to discipline, and the aim is to explore ways in which we can bring children up to be self-reliant, self-confident and self-disciplined through techniques that:

- √ bring out human excellence at all levels: character, academic, and 'being';
- √ contribute to the all-round development of the child (the heart as well as the head and the hands);
- √ help children to know who they are;
- √ help children to realise their full potential; and
- √ develop self-reliance, self-confidence, and attitudes of selfless service.

One successful way of achieving this is the Family Meeting (described by Nelsen, 1996). According to Nelsen, the Family Meeting is not a strategy for enabling either parents or their children to win over the other, but rather to create an ambience of mutual respect for each others' needs and mutually agreed ways of solving issues that are a problem to any family member.

She describes it as an effective way of avoiding many of the difficulties that usually arise over discipline – although the main aim is not this, but giving children the chance to be respected and respectful.

Nelsen describes the following key features of the Family Meeting (pp.168-183):

- The meeting should be held at a set time once a week. It can be combined with a family meal or some special treat. It should be treated as important and should not be skipped or interrupted.
- Establish some rules that develop mutual respect, such as only one person speaking at a time and everyone having an equal right to speak and to be listened to.

- Encourage everyone to say something that they admire about the other family members before the meeting starts.

- An issue that is seen as a problem by any family member is listed on the agenda, so it can be solved at the next meeting – after a cooling-off period.

- Each family member who wants to do so, including those involved in the issue, can contribute a possible solution to the issue. Everybody's suggestions should be treated equally and there should not be any comments made by any of the other members as the suggestions are made.

- After all of the suggestions have been made, the key people involved in the issue are given the opportunity to decide which of the suggested solutions is realistic and reasonable to put into place.

- If any member of the family is not behaving in a way that is considered acceptable to other members, a consensus is reached about what will be the logical consequence of that behaviour continuing. For example, the agreement might be that if one family member consistently fails to put dirty clothes in the laundry basket, those clothes will not be washed. It is important that everyone keeps to the agreed consequence and that nobody, including the parents, gives in and washes the clothes anyway even if they are needed urgently.

Nelsen points out it is particularly important that there are no "I told you so's" or "It serves you right" when logical consequences are implemented, but rather that they are approached calmly and firmly but without recriminations.

She also cautions that the effects might not be noticeable immediately and things might even get worse before they get better, because children often do not trust at first that adults are really

willing to listen to them and take them seriously. So she advises persistence and determination.

In addition, Nelsen describes that very often children will rally and carry out the decisions actively in the few days after the meeting – it is after a week or so that they start to slip, and this is when patience and determination are particularly necessary.

**How does the Family Meeting fit the ideas of Educare?**



This article started with a reminder about the key elements of Educare and the need to try to keep these in mind as the goals of the discipline strategies that we use. These goals have been listed again below. Beside each one, make a few

notes about how the Family Meeting can help to bring these goals about.

**Your challenge**



Explain to your children the concept of the Family Meeting and ask them if they would be willing to give it a try for a set period of time – say 6 months. Carry out the process for the designated period. At various intervals along the way, discuss with your family whether it is working and what the positive effects are. From time to time, refer to the checklist in the table above to see if the Educare goals are being met.

**Reference**

*Nelsen, J. (1996). Positive Discipline. N.Y.: Random House. ISBN 0-345-40251-0*

Aspect of Educare	How the Family Meeting can help to achieve this goal
Bring out human excellence at all levels: character, academic, and 'being'	
Contribute to the all-round development of the child (the heart as well as the head and the hands)	
Help children to know who they are	
Help children to realise their full potential	
Develop self-reliance, self-confidence, and attitudes of selfless service	



Answers to Hanuman Chalisa Crossword

Across

Down

- 1. Tulsidas
- 3. Peace
- 5. Dadhichi
- 7. Indrajeet
- 9. Wind God
- 11. Bajarangi
- 13. Monkey
- 15. Guru

- 2. Anjani
- 4. Gunas
- 6. Humility
- 8. Sanjeevani
- 10. Ram
- 12. Ring
- 14. Sorrow