



MONTHLY PARENTING TIP FROM THE ACFC

July, 2009



Planning for the Expected (and Unexpected) with a Family Meeting

School is out, summer has arrived and it's time to start planning the family vacation. Whether you're traveling by car, plane or boat, family vacations can be stressful. Start this year's vacation with a new outlook and a proven plan for parenting that will reduce power struggles and make this important time with your children even more enjoyable. Feeling confident in how to handle and react to temper tantrums and preparing for long trips in a car or plane, will lead to more energy, less stress and a calm that comes with confidence and leadership. A good first step is to hold a family meeting to talk about where to go and to let the kids know what you expect from them. A family meeting is one of the best ways to teach your children the "give and take" that comes with cooperative problem solving or decision making.

To keep the meeting running smoothly, start by suggesting one basic ground rule for family meetings, asking if everyone will agree to the following: *We will treat each other respectfully.* Next, ask everyone to contribute some ideas about what that means to them, such as:

We will listen while someone else is speaking.

We will wait until the speaker is finished before speaking ourselves.

We will not insult or put down anybody else's ideas.

Now that you've discussed the options on where to go, and made that important decision, it's a good time for a Problem-Prevention Talk before hitting the road. Many conflicts and misunderstandings can be prevented by discussing the guidelines and expectations before a situation occurs. For example, if you have teens, decide together what a reasonable curfew will be and the consequences should they not abide by what's decided. With younger children safety issues are especially important, such as no swimming unless a parent is with them. Children often misbehave simply because they don't know what is expected from them. Many a meltdown can be avoided by letting them know beforehand what is acceptable behavior, and what isn't. Remember the couple who were asked to leave a plane when their daughter wouldn't sit in her seat? Perhaps role playing at home before the flight could have made a stressful situation easier on a child who was unsure of what was expected of her. Plan for long periods of time in a car or plane by letting the child pick out a few special books or toys to bring along, and let them know they can have them when they are quietly seated.

So you've chosen your destination, you've discussed the ground rules, but during your vacation a problem arises. A Problem-Solving Meeting is your next step. "Active Problem Solving" is a simple five-step model for negotiating acceptable solutions to a family problem.

1. Identify the problem – Begin by stating the problem in terms of behavior, and not by attacking the child's personality. For example, you can say, "I have a problem with how messy your room is.", not "I have a problem with your being lazy."
2. Share thoughts and feelings – Explain your feelings about why you feel the behavior is unacceptable and be sure to listen to their side.
3. Brainstorm possible solutions and guidelines – Discuss possible solutions to arrive at a consensus everyone can live with.
4. Choose a solution, including a logical consequence if needed – Once a consensus has been reached, decide on a consequence for not following through.
5. Follow up later – Check to make sure the agreements are kept, and most importantly, encourage them with praise for a job well done. A simple "Thank you" for doing what they agreed to is a building block for future cooperation.

A little planning ahead can make this vacation the best yet. So hit the road with these few handy tips and enjoy the time spent with your family this summer.

© Active Parenting Publishers, Inc.

Learn more about the traits for success and other ways to develop courage, responsibility and character in your children by joining an Active Parenting Online Group. This six-week, video-based interactive class is being offered free to CWA represented employees in DE, MD, PA, NJ, VA, WV, Washington, DC or can be purchased at a discounted rate for non-CWA represented employees.

Visit www.ACFCcares.com for more information and to register for the next available class.