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## Online Exclusive: Why Family Meetings Don't Work: How to Stay Connected to Your Middle School Child

School, sports and a variety of other extracurricular interests challenge a family's ability to stay connected during the school year. Try the weekly check-in instead of a long and drawn-out family meeting.

Staying connected with teens continues to be one of the greatest challenges that middle school parents face. One routine that keeps families communicating is the Weekly Check-in. Different from the traditional family meeting, the weekly check-in focuses on positive comments, goal setting and acknowledgment of effort and achievement.

Steps to a productive weekly check-in:

- Block out 25 minutes when everyone in the family can sit together. Sundays and Mondays can be ideal days as the week is just getting started which gives everyone an opportunity to talk about what's coming up.
- Begin with appreciations. Everyone takes an opportunity to share an appreciation with someone else in the family. Often family members will appreciate something kind that was said or done for another family member. "Thank you for taking me to the movies," is an example of a statement that a child might share with a parent. The round of appreciations should take approximately five minutes.
- Acknowledge effort. With a focus on effort and its connection to achievement, children begin to value the energy they put into their school work and extracurricular interests rather than the achievement itself. When parents share examples from their lives that highlight effort, their children are inspired to persevere in their own lives. During this portion of the weekly check-in each family member shares an example from the previous week when they gave extra effort in some area of their life.
- Plan for the future. Goal setting keeps people moving forward. Everyone shares a goal for the coming week. Goals can focus on personal pursuits or academic achievements. In either case the stated goal should focus on the effort as well as the achievement and should be achievable within a week. Achieving straight A's on the quarterly report card is not achievable within a 7-day period, yet giving my best effort to prepare for the math test this week is both achievable and directly connected to the effort a child chooses to expend.
- Check the calendar. With the assistance of a standard desktop calendar, note any events or commitments that will occur in the coming week. Charting the week's events gives everyone a snapshot of any potential conflicts. Problem solving now becomes a family activity rather than something mom and dad need to find a solution for. If mom has an appointment at the same time as baseball practice there is an opportunity for the family to brainstorm potential solutions.
- Schedule the next check-in. Before everyone heads out to start the week, take a minute to block out a time the following week when you will come back together.

In 25 minutes your family will have the opportunity to appreciate each other, focus on acknowledging effort, plan for the future and problem solve their way to a more connected school year.

*Joe Bruzzese, MA, is a nationally recognized parent education speaker, university professor and author of A Parent's Guide to the Middle School Years. Visit [ThinkingForwardTV.com](#), the source for parents who want to thrive during the middle school years.*

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