How to Create a Family Mission Statement

Before you start thinking about your family mission statement, decide together that you won't get hung up on whether it "sounds good" or "looks right." The end product isn't as important as the process – this task of creating your family mission statement is where the real magic happens.

You'll have a chance to bond and connect as a family as you empathetically listen to each other.

As you share your vision for your family with them, as well as the values and principles you think should guide the family, their confidence in you will increase. And vice versa, your confidence in your family will increase as you hear them share their ideas.

Simply having the discussion about values and principles as a family will guide your children to start thinking about these things in their daily lives, which, in my opinion is a big win itself.

Step 1: Call a Special Family Meeting

While your role is to initiate and guide the process of drafting your family's mission statement, every member of the family should have a say and be part of its creation. So, the first step in creating a family mission statement is to hold a family meeting where everyone can take part in the discussion.

It's recommended that these meetings be special occasions. Maybe you can take a family vacation and set aside a day to brainstorm a family mission statement. You don't even have to go far from home. Rent a hotel room nearby, order pizza, get everyone in their PJs, and start the discussion. The key is to make the occasion different from any other "family meeting" or night of the week.

Family Mission Statement Meeting Guidelines

- Make sure everyone gets a say. As the family leader, don't let a single person monopolize the discussion. Remember, where there's no involvement, there's no commitment.
- Listen empathetically. Even if you think your six-year-old is just spouting off weird six-year-old-things like "Our family loves pizza!", really focus on listening to them. Kids, like any other human, want to feel like their contributions matter.
- Write things down. Make sure someone is capturing all the ideas that get spit out during your family mission statement jam session. You'll need to review the notes when you sit down to write out the statement. If you have older kids who can write, elect one of them to act as scribe and write down ideas on a dry erase board or easel pad so everyone can see. If those aren't available, create a special "Family Mission Statement Journal" to capture ideas.
- You don't have to do this in one sitting. The last thing you want to do is to turn creating a family mission statement into a chore that your kids find unbearable. Having a marathon mission statement meeting will do that, especially if the kids are younger. Remember, the process is the most important thing, and you don't have to crank out a completed family mission statement in one sitting! It's okay to take it slow.
- If you have younger kids (4-10 years old) try to keep your meetings between 15 and 30 minutes; if they're older than 10, 30-45 minute sessions are probably best. If you have toddlers (18 months to 3 years old) you may consider waiting until they're older before they take part in the family mission statement meeting. If you want to include them, don't worry if there are interruptions, and try to explain to them what's going on in terms they can understand.

Step 2: Ask Questions and Discuss What Your Family Is All About

Once you've got everyone gathered, it's time to start talking about what your family's mission is. This is your chance to communicate with your children about your values and hear what they want their family to be like.

Here are some suggested questions:

Questions to Ask for Families of Three or More

What is the purpose of our family?

What kind of family do we want to be?

What kinds of things do we want to do?

What kind of feeling do we want to have in our home?

What kind of home would you like to invite your friends to?

What embarrasses you about our family?

What makes you want to come home?

What do we want to be remembered by?

What kind of relationships do we want to have with one another?

How do we want to treat one another and speak to one another?

What things are truly important to us as a family?

What are the unique talents, gifts, and abilities of family members?

What are our responsibilities as family members?

What are the principles and guidelines we want our family to follow?

Who are our heroes? What it is about them that we like and would like to emulate?

What families inspire us and why do we admire them?

How can we contribute to society as a family and become more service-oriented?

Step 3: Make a List of Your Family's Core Values

After you discuss and write down answers to the questions above, generate a list of your family's values. You shouldn't create a list of values you think you "should" have. These days with so many of us having a public, online identities in addition to our "real" lives, it can be hard to shake the feeling that you have an audience watching whatever you're creating. Even if you have no intention of sharing your mission statement on Facebook, you may unconsciously try to create one you think others would "like" and be impressed by.

Instead of imagining what you think other people would approve of, or what you're "supposed" to value as a family, focus on those values and principles that truly resonate and inspire every member of your family. But how do you know if a value is really "core" to your family?

"*A core value is something so central you would say, 'Even if it's harmful to us, we would still hold on to this value. Even if we had to pay penalties, even if we had to punish our children for violating it, even if we had to deny them something that would bring them pleasure, we would still hold to it*.'"

Make your list of values as big as you want – you'll pare it down later. Here are some ideas to jog your thoughts:

Adventure

Creativity

Discipline

Education

Fun

Health

Honesty

Humor

Integrity

Kindness

Service

Step 4: Decide on 10 (or Fewer) Big Ideas

You've now probably amassed a giant list of values /goals/ideas that could be included in your mission statement. While it's tempting to include every good value you can think of, a huge, unwieldy, and generic list that no one can remember will be meaningless and defeat the whole purpose of the exercise. So, work to whittle your master list down to 3 (or fewer) "Big Ideas" that encapsulate your family's mission.

- If some of the things you listed are just two words describing the same idea, combine them.
- Put a star by the values/phrases/goals/ideas everyone feels sure about.

One effective and democratic way to hone your list was described in The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families:

"*We put all the words on a big flip chart and gave everyone 10 votes. They could use up to three votes per item if they wished, but they could not spend more than ten votes in total. After the vote, we were left with about ten items that were important to everyone*."

Step 5: Write Out Your Family Mission Statement

Once you have your list of Big Ideas, it's time to synthesize them into a single mission statement. Brace yourself – this can be difficult. As you write out your mission statement, keep in mind the following guidelines:

- Keep it short. Mission statements work best if they're kept short, because short is memorable. Try to keep your mission statement under 20 words.
- Make it collaborative. For example, task each member of the family with writing a phrase of your Big Ideas. Then have them present their work for family discussion and approval.
- Even if you do most of the writing yourself, get plenty of feedback from the other members of your family and give them a final vote of approval.
- There isn't one right way to write a family mission statement. Some families write out their mission statement essay style; others create a bullet point list of the values that they strive to live by. Both are fine, as well as any number of other creative formats. In The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families, Covey mentions a few families that even wrote their mission statement as a song.
- Take as much time as you need. Write, edit, and re-write until everyone is happy with the final product. This is something you'll look to for years and years, so it's okay if it takes a few weeks to get it just right.

To give you some ideas on what a family mission statement could look like, here are two examples from The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families:

1) Our family mission is to:
   Value honesty with ourselves and others.
   Create an environment where each of us can find support and encouragement in achieving our life's goals.
   Respect and accept each person's unique personality and talents.
   Promote a loving, kind, and happy atmosphere.
   Support family endeavors that better society.
   Maintain patience through understanding.
   Always resolve conflicts with each other rather than harboring anger.
   Promote the realization of life's treasures.

2) Our family mission:
   To love each other…
   To help each other…
   To believe in each other…
   To wisely use our time, talents, and resources to bless others…
   Forever.

3) May our first word be adventure and our last word be love.
   We live lives of passion.
   We dream undreamable dreams.
   We are travelers not tourists.
   We help others to fly.
   We love to learn.
   We don't like dilemmas, we like solutions.
   We push through. We believe!
   We know it's okay to make mistakes.
   We bring people together.

4) We strive to make our home a refuge from the cares and troubles of the world.
   We do hard things.
   We're creators, not consumers.
   We stay hungry and humble.
   We face adversity with stoicism.
   We show kindness to our family members and others.
   We help each other reach our potential.
   We're devoted to life-long learning.
   We face life with a sense of humor and a lot of laughter.

Step 6: Hang Your Family Mission Statement in a Prominent Place in the House

Once your family is happy with the mission statement, consider printing it up on some high falootin' fabric paper, framing it, and then hanging it up in a prominent place in the house. Now you have a constant visual reminder of what your family is all about and what you're striving for together.

Step 7: Refer to Your Mission Statement Daily & Use It

A family mission statement is useless if you don't use it. As you go about your day-to-day life, be intentional about finding teaching moments in which you can refer back to your family mission statement.

Step 8: Re-Draft When Appropriate

Families change as the years go by — kids get older and life-changing events occur. Feel free to adjust your mission statement when you think it's appropriate, but don't make it a frequent occurrence. It should be like amending the U.S. Constitution — rarely and with reservation.