

A number of years ago I heard the saying “**fail to plan, plan to fail**”. Over time I have come to realize that this can apply to so many areas of life – including raising a family. I’m not really talking about planning your pregnancy, or where you will go for your next holiday (although these things can be important ☺). I’m talking more about sitting down and taking stock of where your family is headed as a group. Things like;

- What kinds of values and morals are being learned in my home?
- Are my kids growing up to be resourceful, resilient and respectful individuals?
- Is my relationship with my kids getting stronger or is it becoming kind of strained?
- Am I being the parent I want to be?

If we never stop and think about these kinds of questions how will we ever know if we’re on the right track? I’d rather find out now (while I can still do something about it) if I’m actually going in the general direction of *Happily Ever After* than suddenly arrive and find myself at *If only Town*. Thinking about these kinds of questions, helps us become aware of the big picture. We don’t need a detailed map dictating our every move in life we just need basic guidelines and a check-in every now and then to make sure things are going okay. The analogy I like to use is that of an airplane – 90% of the time they are slightly off course yet by making little corrections they still reach their final destination in the end. Imagine a flight destined for Hawaii landing in the ocean by mistake!

So how do you do this? One way is to create your own questions similar to those above (I find thinking about how you would like things to be when your kids are all grown up to be a good reminder of the big picture). Then sit down with your family, share your thoughts, listen to theirs and figure out where you are now. While doing this, it’s important to remember you are the captain, but if the rest of the crew doesn’t believe they have had a say in what’s been decided, turbulence and even possible hijacking could be in your future. So be open to everyone’s ideas and feelings then take that information and use it to brainstorm a final destination. Like any good flight plan what you come up with should tell others where you are heading along with the basic path you plan to follow to get there.

I’ve outlined below a family meeting as one way to approach this kind of conversation but it does not need to be this formal. Having positive conversations like these with your family in any setting can work and increase openness and communication at the same time.

By developing or tweaking your flight plan while your journey is still underway, you can make corrections as needed and ensure that where you are headed is pretty close to where you were hoping to go. Until next time... I wish you good flying!

#### Ideas for creating a fun and effective family meeting:

- Dedicate a regular time for your meeting and do your best to keep it!
- Keep it short – ½ hour is usually the max for kids 12 and under.
- Have a list posted in a common area so anyone can jot ideas down for the next meeting.
- Plan the time – set up a flexible agenda for how the time will look (for example: check-in; concerns, chore schedule, fun activity).
- Take turns at the different roles. Even the young can be in charge of something (planning fun activity, setting up the space, gathering the list...)
- Limit complaint time. If time is needed to settle everyone down use a check-in, or allow a short period for complaint time (i.e. 2 minute – complaint centre - during this time everyone rants and raves simultaneously). Once it’s over – no more complaints!
- Have someone take notes to remind everyone what they agreed upon.
- Do what you agreed to do! If you said you would find more time to play... do that. If your child agreed they would walk the dog nightly remind them of their duty (a reminder is okay, but careful not to nag... if they aren’t doing it put it back on the list to discuss again at the next meeting, or enforce your agreed upon consequence)
- Take time for fun! Set aside time at the end of the meeting to have some fun. Give compliments, play a game, go for a walk together... make it something your family enjoys and you’ll find they look forward to the next meeting