

Family Councils

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When parents are prepared and children listen and participate in the discussion, the family council is truly working!

My brothers and sisters, the irony of being parents is that we tend to get good at it after our children are grown. I will share with you this afternoon something I wish I had understood better when Barbara and I began to raise our precious children.

During my apostolic ministry, I have frequently emphasized the power and importance of Church councils, including mission, stake, ward, and auxiliary councils.

I believe councils are the most effective way to get real results. Additionally, I know councils are the Lord's way and that He created all things in the universe through a heavenly council, as mentioned in the holy scripture.¹

Until now, however, I have never talked in general conference about the most basic and fundamental—and perhaps the most important—of all councils: the family council.

Family councils have always been needed. They are, in fact, eternal. We belonged to a family council in the premortal existence, when we lived with our heavenly parents as their spirit children.

A family council, when conducted with love and with Christlike attributes, will counter the impact of modern technology that often distracts us from spending quality time with each other and also tends to bring evil right into our homes.

Please remember that family councils are different from family home evening held on Mondays. Home evenings focus primarily on gospel instruction and family activities. Family councils, on the other hand, can be held on any day of the week, and they are primarily a meeting at which parents listen—to each other and to their children.

I believe there are at least four types of family councils:

First, a general family council consisting of the entire family.

Second, an executive family council consisting of a mother and father.

Third, a limited family council consisting of parents and one child.

Fourth, a one-on-one family council consisting of one parent and one child.

In all of these family council settings, electronic devices need to be turned off so everyone can look at and listen to each other. During family councils and at other appropriate times, you may want to have a basket for the electronic devices so when the family gathers, everyone—including Mom and Dad—can deposit his or her phones, tablets, and MP3 players in the basket. Thereafter, they can counsel together without being tempted to respond to a poke on Facebook, to a text, to Instagram, to Snapchat, or to email alerts.

Let me briefly share with you how each of these types of family councils can work.

First, the full family council includes all family members.

The Church pamphlet entitled *Our Family* states, "This council can meet to discuss family problems, work out finances, make plans, support and strengthen [each other], and pray for one another and for the family unit."²

This council should meet at a predesignated time and is normally more formal than any other type of family council.

It should start with a prayer, or it may simply be a natural extension of conversations already started in other settings. Please note that a family council may not always have a formal beginning or ending.

When parents are prepared and children listen and participate in the discussion, the family council is truly working!

No matter what our particular family situation is, it is critical that we understand the unique circumstances of each family member. Though we may share DNA, there may be situations and circumstances among us that may make us vastly different from each other and which may require the compassionate collaboration of the family council.

For example, all the talking and sharing and loving in the world may not solve a

medical problem or an emotional challenge that one or more family members may be facing. At such times, the family council becomes a place of unity, loyalty, and loving support as outside help is enlisted in the search for solutions.

Siblings, especially the older ones, can be powerful mentors to young children if parents will use the family council to enlist their help and support during times of difficulty and duress.

In this way, a family is much like a ward. When the bishop involves ward council members, he can solve problems and accomplish a lot of good in ways he never could do without their help. In a similar fashion, parents need to involve all family members in dealing with challenges and adversity. That way, the power of the family council is put to work. When council members feel they are part of a decision, they become supporters and specific positive results can be accomplished.

Not every family council consists of two parents and children. Your family council may look very different than our family council looked when we were raising our seven children. Today our family council consists only of Barbara and me, unless we hold an extended family council that includes our adult children, their spouses, and sometimes our grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Those who are single and even students living away from home can follow the divine council pattern by gathering with friends and roommates to counsel together.

Consider how the atmosphere in an apartment would change if roommates gathered regularly to pray, listen, discuss, and plan things together.

Everyone can adapt a family council to take advantage of this divine pattern established by our loving Heavenly Father.

As noted previously, from time to time an expanded family council may be helpful. An expanded family council can be composed of grandparents and adult children who are not living at home. Even if grandparents or adult children live far away, they can participate in family councils via the telephone, Skype, or FaceTime.

You may want to consider holding the general family council on Sunday, which is the first day of the week; families can review the past week and plan for the coming week. This may be exactly what your family needs to help make the Sabbath a delightful experience.

The second type of family council is an executive family council that involves

only the parents. During this time together, parents can review each child's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs and his or her progress.

The executive family council is also a good time for wives and husbands to talk about their personal relationships with each other. When Elder Harold B. Lee performed our sealing, he taught us a principle that I believe all couples will find helpful. He said, "Never retire without kneeling together, holding hands, and saying your prayers. Such prayers invite Heavenly Father to counsel us by the power of the Spirit."

The third type of family council is a limited family council. Here, both parents spend time with an individual child in a formal or an informal setting. This is an opportunity for a discussion on *making decisions in advance* about such things as what he or she will and will not do in the future. When such decisions are made, he or she may want to record them for future reference if needed. If your son or daughter sees you as a staunch supporter, this council meeting can establish goals and objectives for the future. This is also a time to carefully listen to serious concerns and challenges that a child may have faced with such things as lack of confidence, abuse, bullying, or fear.

The fourth type of family council is a one-on-one family council involving one parent and one child. This type of family council generally just happens. For example, the parent and child can take advantage of informal opportunities while traveling in the car or working around the house. An outing with one child with either father or mother can provide a special spiritual and emotional bonding time. Calendar these in advance so children can anticipate and look forward to a special time alone with Mom or Dad.

Now, brothers and sisters, there was a time when the walls of our homes provided all the defense we needed against outside intrusions and influences. We locked the doors, closed the windows; we shut the gates; and we felt safe, secure, and protected in our own little refuge from the outside world.

Those days are now gone. The physical walls, doors, fences, and gates of our homes cannot prevent unseen invasion from the Internet, the Wi-Fi, the mobile phones, the networks. They can penetrate our homes with just a few clicks and keystrokes.

Fortunately, the Lord has provided a way to counter the invasion of negative technology that can distract us from spending quality time with each other. He has done this by providing the council system to strengthen, protect, safeguard, and nurture our most precious relationships.

Children desperately need parents willing to listen to them, and the family council can provide a time during which family members can learn to understand and love one another.

Alma taught, "Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good."³ Inviting the Lord to be part of our family council through prayer will improve our relationships with each other. We can, with Heavenly Father and our Savior's help, become more patient, thoughtful, helpful, forgiving, and understanding as we pray for help. With Their help, we can make our homes a little bit of heaven here on earth.

A family council that is patterned after the councils in heaven, filled with Christlike love, and guided by the Lord's Spirit will help us to protect our family from distractions that can steal our precious time together and protect us from the evils of the world.

Combined with prayer, a family council will invite the presence of the Savior, as He promised: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."⁴ Inviting the Spirit of the Lord to be part of your family council brings blessings beyond description.

Finally, please remember that a family council held regularly will help us spot family problems early and nip them in the bud; councils will give each family member a feeling of worth and importance; and most of all they will assist us to be more successful and happy in our precious relationships, within the walls of our homes. May our Heavenly Father bless all of our families as we counsel together is my humble prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.