



# COUNSEL TOGETHER OFT

## Family Councils for Couples

By Nichole Eck

Councils in the Church follow a divine pattern at every level, from the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to stake, ward, branch, quorum, and other leadership

councils. “The most basic council of the Church,” said President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985), is the family council.<sup>1</sup>

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught that “family councils are ideal forums for effective communication to take place.”<sup>2</sup> They are, he explained, a time to “talk about the needs of the family and the needs of individual members of the family, . . . solve problems, make family decisions, [and] plan day-to-day and long-range family activities and goals.”<sup>3</sup>

If you haven’t had a family council, you can start today. If you have children living with you, you can include them. However, it is also important that husbands and wives have a separate family council where they can

discuss family and personal issues privately.

Here are some principles and practical suggestions you can apply to your family councils between husband and wife.

### Start with Prayer

*“When communication with Heavenly Father breaks down, communication between spouses also breaks down.”<sup>4</sup>*

The Lord can be a vital participant in your marriage. In your prayer, you can thank Heavenly Father for your many blessings, including your spouse, and ask for His Spirit to permeate your conversation. His Spirit can guide your discussion and help foster good feelings and good communication.

Couples face many problems and decisions. These six principles of family councils can help.



## Decide Together

*“Consensus of the council members must be obtained, through prayer and discussion, to achieve that unity which is prerequisite to the Lord’s help.”<sup>5</sup>*

You and your spouse must make important decisions, such as whether or not to take a job offer, where to apply for school, when to have children, or how to divide housework. Husbands and wives can propose possible solutions to problems and

discuss them. Humbly listen to your spouse’s input. This can help you learn to understand another point of view and will remind your spouse that you value his or her opinion.

In family councils, we must reach our important decisions “by divine consensus, not by compromise.”<sup>6</sup> You may not be able to achieve this unity on every issue immediately. It may take several councils and sincere

prayer—both individually and with your spouse—to agree on a decision. But “if you will confer in council as you are expected to do, God will give you solutions to the problems that confront you.”<sup>7</sup>

It may also be helpful to decide beforehand on a topic for a family council. This will give you time to ponder the subject so you and your spouse can feel more prepared to voice your thoughts.

## Evaluate Yourself

*“Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (Matthew 7:3).*

You have the power to change only one person: yourself. You may be tempted to use a family council to present a list of criticisms of your spouse. Instead, approach these councils with a desire to improve yourself. Ask your spouse if there is anything problematic or worrisome he or she has noticed in your words or behavior.



Make goals for personal improvement and ask for your spouse's support as you strive to change. Support your spouse in any personal goals he or she wishes to make.

### **Talk about the Hard Stuff**

*“Every family has problems and challenges. But successful families try to work together toward solutions instead of resorting to criticism and contention.”<sup>8</sup>*

Strong marriages are built by overcoming challenges, not by ignoring or avoiding them. There will be times when serious issues arise that need to be discussed. You may struggle to work through issues of sin and repentance or financial burdens, for example, but the open and honest communication of a family council can help soften strong feelings. A family council can act as an appropriate

and comfortable forum to bring up concerns or to ask for help.

Focus your energies on possible solutions to the problem and avoid bickering or criticism. Be humble. Share love for your spouse and remind each other that you are working together to build a happy, eternal marriage and family.

### **Keep It Positive**

*“If you call family councils only “in times of stress . . . and never to recognize . . . achievements or to compliment [your family members] and show your love to them, then they will learn to dread family councils.”<sup>9</sup>*

Not all family council meetings need to focus on problems or decisions. You can take opportunities to share something positive about your spouse or share the blessings in your life. You can celebrate

individual achievements, discuss ways to spiritually strengthen your marriage and family, make goals together, or express gratitude for your spouse's strengths or acts of service. Use family councils to “establish habits of communication and mutual respect on which . . . [you and your spouse] can rely when serious and difficult problems arise.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Persevere**

*“Let us do the best we can and try to improve each day. When our imperfections appear, we can keep trying to correct them. We can be more forgiving of flaws in ourselves and among those we love.”<sup>11</sup>*

Finally, remember that replacing poor communication habits with positive patterns takes time and practice. Your first family council may seem awkward or





## WHAT DO WE TALK ABOUT?

If you don't know what to talk about in a family council, consider questions like these:

- How can we divide up the work so that each member shares home responsibilities and feels good about what he or she is doing?
- What sort of media will we allow in the house?
- What new skills can we learn as a family?
- What can we do as a family to eliminate quarreling?
- What activities will encourage us to keep the Sabbath day holy?
- How can we prepare for a natural disaster?
- How will we be more involved in our community?
- What new traditions can we start as a family?
- How can we be better about managing our finances?
- What can we do to spiritually strengthen our marriage?

intimidating, but as you humbly strive to communicate with each other and include the Lord in your decisions, you will better understand the blessings of family councils.

The Lord intends for us to have peace in our homes and in our communication. He helps us where we fall short and blesses our efforts. With His help, we can nurture “an atmosphere of respect, understanding, and harmony”<sup>12</sup> that will make our homes, as President Thomas S. Monson promised, “a bit of heaven here on earth.”<sup>13</sup> ■

*The author lives in Utah, USA.*

### NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 211.

2. M. Russell Ballard, *Counseling with Our Councils: Learning to Minister Together in the Church and in the Family* (2012), 165.
3. M. Russell Ballard, “Family Councils: A Conversation with Elder and Sister Ballard,” *Ensign*, June 2003, 16.
4. M. Russell Ballard, “Family Councils,” 19.
5. Ronald E. Poelman, “Priesthood Councils: Key to Meeting Temporal and Spiritual Needs,” *Ensign*, May 1980, 91.
6. Ronald E. Poelman, “Priesthood Councils,” 91.
7. Stephen L Richards, in Conference Report, Oct. 1953, 86.
8. Ezra Taft Benson, “Counsel to the Saints,” *Ensign*, May 1984, 6.
9. *When Thou Art Converted, Strengthen Thy Brethren* (Melchizedek Priesthood study guide, 1974), 168.
10. “Family Councils: A Heavenly Pattern,” *Follow Me: Relief Society Personal Study Guide* (1989), 171.
11. Russell M. Nelson “Perfection Pending,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 88.
12. “Working Together in Family Councils,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1985, 31.
13. Thomas S. Monson, “Hallmarks of a Happy Home,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, 69.