

Family Mealtime

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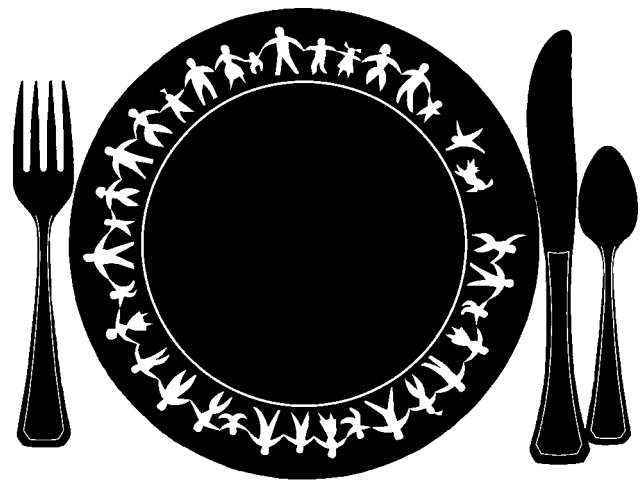
Keep it FUN! Keep it SIMPLE! Just KEEP it!

Family mealtime is much more than something good to eat! It nourishes the body, mind, and soul. This program topic is about:

- ◆ understanding the value of family mealtime,
- ◆ exploring ways to make it happen for your family, and
- ◆ getting the most out of the time together.

Sometimes, the best family memories are of special meals and times together around the kitchen table. **As a program topic leader, please note the discussion questions and activities that are * in italics.**

- * *What memorable moments stand out in your mind when you think of family mealtime?*
- * *Why is family mealtime important?*
Sharing foods in a pleasant, social environment is healthy for families in many ways. The whole family benefits from family mealtime by:
 - ☺ ***Having better nutrition*** – Studies show that people eat more balanced meals and a variety of foods when they eat with family or friends.
 - ☺ ***Improving family communication*** – Time to share ideas, thoughts, and feelings builds relationships. Research shows that children who often hear adult conversation improve vocabulary, reading test scores, and speaking skills.
 - ☺ ***Fostering family traditions*** – Foods and memories created around the family table help shape and give meaning to our cultural heritage.
 - ☺ ***Teaching life skills*** – Children learn cooking skills, appreciation for foods, and other important life skills.



Family mealtime benefits children's intellectual, physical, and emotional development.

- * *How do children learn valuable life lessons?*
They can learn by:
 - ☺ watching adults using such skills as table manners, conversation, sharing, etc.;
 - ☺ making healthful food choices;
 - ☺ regulating portion sizes according to their own feelings of hunger and fullness;
 - ☺ practicing fine motor and coordination skills such as pouring, scooping, and serving;
 - ☺ sharing, taking turns, and socializing, which builds self-confidence and self-esteem; and
 - ☺ taking responsibility in setting the table, preparing food, and cleaning up.

- * *What is mealtime like in **your** family?*
It depends on what your family is like. Families come in all shapes, sizes, and relationships. Family means the people you love and spend time with.
- * *What words describe your family mealtime?*

*Hectic? Fast food restaurant?
Stressful? TV companion?
No time? Feeding frenzy?
Nonstop snacking? Lonely?*



TIME is a big challenge for many families. Even the busiest families can find time to eat together. But it's not easy. As a family, talk about how important mealtime is. Ask family members for their ideas about how to make mealtime peaceful and enjoyable for everyone.

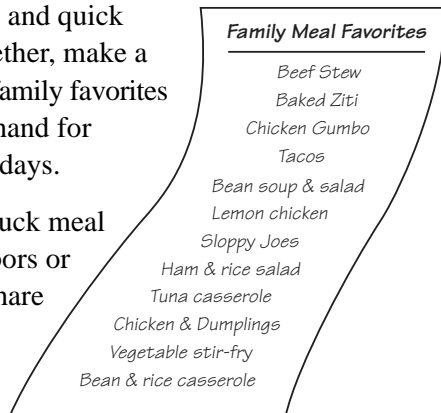
Here are a few creative examples of ways families can make time for each other:

1. Turn off the television during mealtime.
2. Plan ahead every week to anticipate work, school, and other activities that may affect mealtime.
3. Be flexible about the time of family meals. Maybe breakfast is the one meal when everyone can be together.



4. Get creative about where you eat together. Ball practice? Pack a "picnic" dinner or "tailgate."
5. Share the responsibilities of shopping, preparing, serving, and cleaning up. If possible, get into a routine of shared tasks.

6. Plan simple and quick meals. Together, make a list of easy family favorites to keep on hand for extrahectic days.
7. Have a potluck meal with neighbors or friends to share the cooking and the fun.



Whether family meals happen every day or occasionally, your family will feel the rewards of spending more time together. Savor the food **and** savor the time.

**What additional ideas do you have for making mealtime priority time?*

- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

How can mealtime go from ho-hum to family fun? INVOLVE everyone! In WL 129, you'll find a calendar of ideas.

** How many ideas can you and your family add to the calendar?*

Families with Young Children: Learning Together

Mealtime is a perfect time to practice social skills and expose children to a variety of new foods. Here are some tips and ideas for making mealtime with little ones less stressful.

- ◆ Be a good role model in conversation; listen to others and maintain eye contact. Take turns and see that everyone gets a chance to talk with “indoor” voices.
- ◆ Pique children’s interest in nutrition. They can make colorful place mats by painting, drawing, or cutting magazine pictures of favorite foods.
- ◆ Place a cup in the center of the table. Fill it with slips of paper with “conversation starters.” Children can make up questions, rhymes, riddles, or jokes about food.
- ◆ Challenge the children to name a food for each letter of the alphabet. Or, how many fruits can they name? How many ways can potatoes be prepared?

- ◆ Put newsprint or a disposable paper tablecloth on the table and encourage children to draw or write “Food for Thought” about foods. Include adjectives or descriptions of the meal.
 - ◆ Plan a pretend grocery shopping trip. “I’m going grocery shopping and I will buy...(Name healthful foods to put in the grocery cart.) Each family member repeats each food, then adds another as you go around the table, taking turns. Using the same idea, plan a picnic or a party.
 - ◆ Play a card game. Draw or cut out magazine pictures of foods and glue them to index cards. Write the food name on the card. (The children can make their own cards.) Take turns picking a card and guessing which food group it belongs in on the Food Guide Pyramid.
 - ◆ Play a food guessing game. Each child takes a turn, saying, “I’m thinking of a food that is _____,” giving clues for others to try and guess.
- * *Do you have “tried and true” ideas that have worked for families with young children?*

A child develops the security and belonging he/she needs by making contributions at mealtime, enjoying a warm kitchen with a cook who is listening, and sitting around the table with family and friends.

The MOST IMPORTANT thing to remember about family mealtime is to *relax, interact, and have fun!*



It’s important to remember that adults are responsible for deciding what foods are purchased, the variety of menu choices, and the time schedule. **They create the mealtime environment.** Adults also influence children’s own food choices, encourage children to try the foods, and help children develop healthy attitudes toward the food. Positive attitudes about a variety of foods and the mealtime experience have a big impact on children. **Children are responsible for deciding whether to eat, what to eat, and how much to eat.** It is important to trust children to make their own decisions. As children grow up, parents need to give them more decision-making power and responsibility at mealtime.

Adapted from:

“Resetting the Family Table,” Oregon Dairy Council Nutrition Education Service. 1997

“Exploring Healthy Eating,” Center on Hunger, Poverty, and Nutrition Policy, School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University, for HIPPI USA

Resources & References:

“Environmental Influences on Children’s Eating” by Susan J. Crockett and Laura S. Sims, *Journal of Nutrition Education*, Sept/Oct 1995, p. 235-249.

How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much, Ellen M. Satter, Palo Alto: Bull Publishing. 1987

Table Talk, Mimi Wilson and Mary Beth Lagerborg, Focus on the Family Publishing, Colorado Springs, Co. 1994

1998: 1M

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