



Resources: The Magic of the Family Meal

The Family Dinner Project

<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/>

Six Ways Cooking with Kids Can Boost Literacy Skills

<https://www.scholastic.com/parents/books-and-reading/raise-a-reader-blog/6-ways-cooking-kids-can-boost-literacy-skills.html>

Research: Of Ketchup and Kin: Dinnertime Conversations as a Major Source of Family Knowledge, Family Adjustment, and Family Resilience

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.2126&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

United States Department of Agriculture and Health and Human Services Nutrition Guide

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

Military One Source Health & Wellness Coaching

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/specialty-consultations/health-wellness-coaching>

Anne Fishel, Ph.D. Distinguished Lecture at the MCEC National Training Seminar July 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/user/MilitaryChild/videos>

View MCEC podcast related to this topic at: <https://militarychild.podbean.com/>

Family Dinner Project with Anne Fishel, Ph.D.

Videos

Sesame Street—Device Free Dinner

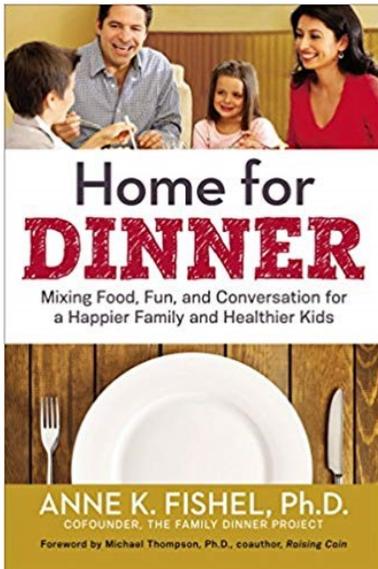
<https://youtu.be/wQ-RbWAwnx8>

Making Family Mealtime More Enjoyable - Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health

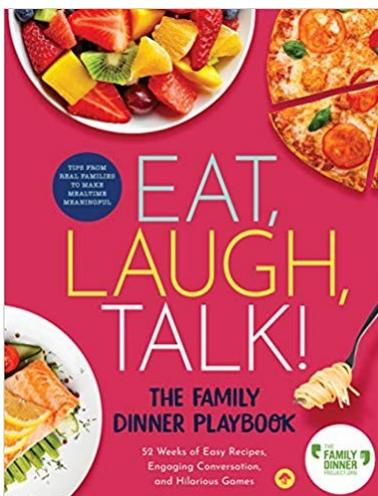
<https://youtu.be/q5vAxk0CJRc>



Resources: The Magic of the Family Meal



Studies have tied shared family meals to increased resiliency and self-esteem in children, higher academic achievement, a healthier relationship to food, and even reduced risk of substance abuse and eating disorders. Written by a Harvard Medical School professor and mother, Home for Dinner makes a passionate and informed plea to put mealtime back at the center of family life and supplies compelling evidence and realistic tips for getting even the busiest of families back to the table.



Eat, Laugh, Talk: The Family Dinner Playbook gives you the tools to have fun family dinners with great food and great conversation. The book includes conversation starters as well as quick and easy recipes to bring your family closer. You will find tips for bringing your family to the table such as setting dinnertime goals, overcoming obstacles, managing conflicting schedules, and how to engage everyone in the conversation.

Eat, Laugh, Talk also includes real stories from families who have successfully become a part of The Family Dinner Project's growing movement. *Let's do dinner!*



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How to bring teens to the table:

- Agree that the dinner table is off limits to discussing conflicts.
- Make the table a device-free zone
- If scheduling conflicts interfere with dinner or mealtime, plan to meet with your family after dinner, say for dessert. Snack time or dessert time still works as shared family mealtime.
- Offer to make your teens' favorite meal or even a meal they are willing to try. Better yet, have your teen be involved with food prep.
- Create a weekly ritual where your kids' friends or extended family members are invited for dinner.
- Initiate conversations that relates to all of you. This will help kids of all ages, especially if the topic is of interest to all.
- Ask your teen to select music that you all can listen to during mealtime.
- Tell a story about something that you struggled with during the day and invite the children to help solve the problem or the dilemma.
- Speak about your own experiences from the day. Maybe share an experience that was challenging.
- Share a joke you heard at school or work today.
- Buy or borrow from the library cookbooks from places that your family has traveled to or places that you are interested in visiting.

Tips to help with picky eaters:

- Make mealtime pleasant
- Turn off the TV and other distractions
- Dinner routine (regular schedule, routine conversations)
- Schedule meals and snacks
- Allow children to have a say and help prepare food
- Model healthy eating

What to avoid:

- Avoid forcing your child to eat
- Avoid nagging
- Avoid bargaining/making deals

For More Information: PARENTS@MILITARYCHILD.ORG





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Thanksgiving Meal Games, adapted from

**™ Eat, Laugh, Talk: The Family Dinner Playbook
(Familius Press, October 2019)**

Anne Fishel, Ph.D., executive director and co-founder, The Family Dinner Project

- 1. The Hat Game:** Before dinner, have each guest write their answers to one or more of the following questions on slips of paper and place them in a hat. (One answer per slip of paper and all answers submitted anonymously). At dinnertime, the host reads the answers aloud, and everyone tries to guess which guest gave which answers!
 - What is a book that transformed your life?
 - What character in a children's book did you most identify with as a child or do you most identify with if you are a child? Harriet the Spy, Jo March
 - What was (is) your favorite toy? My collection of stuffed animals
 - What do you feel most grateful for? My sons and my husband
 - Who do you wish would join us for this holiday meal? Dead or alive, famous or not? My grandfather who I never got to know, Julia Child, Eleanor Roosevelt.
 - What animal would you most like to be? A dolphin
- 2. Top Four:** Before the meal, everyone is given a least 4 slips of paper. Each person writes a phrase or item on each slip (for example, clean sheets, The Grateful Dead, Sunday night, remembering a word you forgot, sleeping late). The slips all go into a jar for the middle of the table.

At dinner, one person starts as a leader. The leader randomly draws four slips of paper from the jar and reads them aloud. Then the leader privately puts the slips of paper in order of preference from most favorite to least. At the same time, the other guests write down the order in which they think the leader would place things. The leader reads his list, and whoever guesses the leader's list order perfectly gets a point.
- 3. Secret Tasks:** Before dinner, the host secretly gives each person a word or phrase. Their secret task is to find a way to use that word or phrase during dinner, without another dinner calling them out for it! Sample phrases might be "That's the way the cookie crumbles," or "That's a real knee-slapper," or "Did I ever tell you about the funniest thing that ever happened to me?" or "This tastes like grasshoppers." See how many people can accomplish their secret task without giving the game away.
- 4. Which One?** Test your knowledge of family history! Think about your family members and ask, "Which one...." (Got married at 19? Rode in the rodeo? Was a WWII pilot?) See who can guess the right family first! Make sure to ask everyone to ask questions because aunts and uncles, grandparents or stepparents may have information that others don't know about.

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Thanksgiving Meal Games (cont.)

5. **Would you rather?**

Own your own boat or own plane?

Live in the city or country?

Always have to enter the room backwards or always have to somersault out?

Have a unicorn horn or a squirrel tail

Eat a bowl full of crickets or a bowl full of worms?

Speak every language in the world or be able to play every instrument?

6. **Invite a cast of characters to dinner:**

Each person thinks of a famous person, book or movie character. They then behave as that character at the dinner table, taking on their mannerisms and voice, and using well known quotations as best they can. See if you can guess who's sitting at the dinner table with you!

"When you see scary things in the news look for the helpers. You'll always find people who are helping.

Go ahead and cry. I'm here to be with you.

There are 3 ways to ultimate success. The first way is to be kind, the second way is to be kind, the

Nobody else can live the life you live

'There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person'.

Guess who?

7. **Which do you prefer?**

Answer as many of these simple 'or' questions in under two minutes. (These are just a sample so feel free to make up your own). One person starts as the interviewer and then switches to answering questions. A third person may keep track of how many questions get asked and answered in a minute, using a stopwatch:

Dogs or cats?

Chocolate or vanilla?

Listen or speak?

Watch or do?

Run or walk?

Socks or no socks?

Coffee or tea?

Summer or winter?

Movies or TV?

Draw or write?

New York or LA?

Sweet or salty?

Thanksgiving Meal Games (cont.)

8. **Two Truths and a Tall Tale** (or a lie)

This is a good game when there are people at the table who don't know each other well. Tell stories. Tell two things about you that are true and one that is made up. Whoever guesses correctly goes next.

I can make a batch of cookies in less time than it takes to drive to the store and buy them.
I love to make cheeseburgers for my family
My adult sons are much better cooks than I am

9. **Song Game**

The first player chooses a word or a category (e.g. Love). Each person at the table then has to come up with a song that uses the word in the lyrics and then sing a line or verse from it. So, for the love example, one person could sing part of "Crazy Love," or "All you need is love." You play until you can't think of another song and then on to the next.

All you need is love, All you need is love
All you need is love, love
Love is all you need
If I fell in love with you would you promise to be true and help me understand,
"Cause I've been in love before
And I found that love was more
Than just holding hands

Love me tender
Love me sweet
Never let me go
You have made my life complete
And I love you so



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Why Involve Your Children with Meal Preparation?

The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages parents to involve their children in meal choices and preparation to help combat childhood obesity. They suggest that parents:

- Allow children choices about what to make for dinner.
- Discuss options for making choices and planning a balanced meal.
- Allow children to help shop for ingredients and prepare the meal.
- At the store, teach children to read food labels so that they begin understanding what to look for.
- During meal preparation, allow children to help by selecting age-appropriate tasks so kids can play a part without getting injured or feeling overwhelmed. Praise their efforts at being the chef.

What to eat for school lunch can be another learning lesson for kids. If you can get them thinking about what they eat for lunch, you might be able to help them make positive changes. Discuss what kinds of foods they'd like for lunch or go to the grocery store to shop together for healthy, packable foods.

Kids should be involved because it can help prepare them to make good decisions on their own about the foods they want to eat. The mealtime habits you help create now can lead to a lifetime of healthier choices.



be a healthy role model for children

10 tips for setting good examples



You are the most important influence on your child. You can do many things to help your children develop healthy eating habits for life. Offering a variety of foods helps children get the nutrients they need from every food group. They will also be more likely to try new foods and to like more foods. When children develop a taste for many types of foods, it's easier to plan family meals. Cook together, eat together, talk together, and make mealtime a family time!

1 show by example

Eat vegetables, fruits, and whole grains with meals or as snacks. Let your child see that you like to munch on raw vegetables.

2 go food shopping together



Grocery shopping can teach your child about food and nutrition. Discuss where vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, and protein foods come from. Let your children make healthy choices.

3 get creative in the kitchen

Cut food into fun and easy shapes with cookie cutters. Name a food your child helps make. Serve "Janie's Salad" or "Jackie's Sweet Potatoes" for dinner. Encourage your child to invent new snacks. Make your own trail mixes from dry whole-grain, low-sugar cereal and dried fruit.

4 offer the same foods for everyone

Stop being a "short-order cook" by making different dishes to please children. It's easier to plan family meals when everyone eats the same foods.



5 reward with attention, not food

Show your love with hugs and kisses. Comfort with hugs and talks. Choose not to offer sweets as rewards. It lets your child think sweets or dessert foods are better than other foods. When meals are not eaten, kids do not need "extras"—such as candy or cookies—as replacement foods.

6 focus on each other at the table

Talk about fun and happy things at mealtime. Turn off the television. Take phone calls later. Try to make eating meals a stress-free time.



7 listen to your child

If your child says he or she is hungry, offer a small, healthy snack—even if it is not a scheduled time to eat. Offer choices. Ask "Which would you like for dinner: broccoli or cauliflower?" instead of "Do you want broccoli for dinner?"

8 limit screen time

Allow no more than 2 hours a day of screen time like TV and computer games. Get up and move during commercials to get some physical activity.

9 encourage physical activity

Make physical activity fun for the whole family. Involve your children in the planning. Walk, run, and play with your child—instead of sitting on the sidelines. Set an example by being physically active and using safety gear, like bike helmets.



10 be a good food role model

Try new foods yourself. Describe its taste, texture, and smell. Offer one new food at a time. Serve something your child likes along with the new food. Offer new foods at the beginning of a meal, when your child is very hungry. Avoid lecturing or forcing your child to eat.