

# Family Dinner Tips

Excellent tips for taking back your family dinner table

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There's no denying the family dinner has a lot of competition these days. From sports practices and homework projects, to television and digital devices, there are dozens of distractions keeping us from enjoying meals together. But don't give up! Studies show that children who have regular meal times with parents (five nights a week) are less at risk for substance abuse, teen pregnancy, depression, and have higher grade point averages overall. Here is some great advice for making dinner time meaningful.

## *Put It on the Calendar*

**1** Choose at least five nights a week that your family will be eating together, set the time, and put it on the schedule. If you have a consistent dinner time every night, chances are it will be easier for everyone to get on board with the plan and participate. If the scheduled dinner time moves, let the family know as soon as possible.

## *Keep It Simple*

**2** Prepare easy, quick crowd-pleasers and keep it simple. A salad bar, casserole, Crock-Pot meal, tacos, turkey burgers, or even brinner (breakfast for dinner) are great options. Use paper plates and plastic utensils or cups if you hate dishes. Time saved in the kitchen can be better spent lingering around the table with your family.

## *Ditch Your Devices*

**3** Eliminate distractions and leave your cell phones, tablets, and laptops in another room. Your notifications and emails will be waiting for you in an hour or two, and you'll be better prepared to face them after unplugging for food and face time (the real kind) with the ones you love.

## *Work Together*

**4** Set expectations for dinner time behavior and give everyone a role to help out in an age-appropriate way. Whether it's laying placemats, setting the table, fixing a side, filling a pitcher, or cleaning up; there is something for everyone to help with.

### *Keep It Lighthearted*

# 5

Dinner time isn't the right time to scold a child for a poor test grade or complain about his messy backpack. Save that for a one-on-one discussion and keep the dinner table a place where pleasant, interesting conversations take place that help you connect with your kids and get to know them.

### *Listen and Learn*

# 6

Find ways to get your kids talking by asking questions and then listening. Play the high/low game (what was the high/low of each other's day). You can also buy a game called Table Topics that poses fun, getting-to-know you questions that are family friendly. You can also discuss current events and listen to each child's thoughts and opinions.

### *Don't Force Feed*

# 7

Forcing kids to eat their food will definitely make the dinner table a place of angst and dread. Instead, encourage your picky eater to try a bite or follow the example of others in the family. Maybe make a game of it as more adventurous eaters challenge other ones to eat by describing each yummy bite.

### *Be in the Moment*

# 8

Try not to think of all you have to do after dinner. Thoughts of homework, baths, cleaning, and more can stress you out and keep you from interacting fully during meals. Your challenge is to stop and truly be in the moment. After all, your child will never be this age again.

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