



## Family Meal Time

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**At Vancouver Island Counselling, we learn and understand the root of family challenges. One of the noticing's of our time are the issues that youth are dealing with, which adversely impacts parents.**

Parents often feel overwhelmed, and powerless to help their children that may be struggling with peer issues, focus and attention. Here is one powerful way of helping the family stay together. Family meal time is vitally important. For many parents, it would be much easier and simpler to forget about family dinners. Jobs, children, after-school activities all contribute to families being constantly on the go, thus feeling the need to eat on the run. But more and more parents are realizing the importance of shared family time at the dinner table. Often, this is the only time when all family members are all together in one place.

Although family dinners are viewed by some people as another burdensome chore at the end of a tiring day, more families realize that the benefits of sharing time at day's end cannot be measured by calories alone.

Numerous studies show that eating together not only is an important aspect of family life, but helps make weight control easier. When a family sits down together, it helps them handle the stresses of daily life and the hassles of day-to-day existence. Eating together tends to promote more sensible eating habits, which in turn helps family members manage their lives more easily.



Here are tips from the experts on family dining:

### **Expectations**

The purpose of a family dinner may differ from family to family. In one family, good table manners might be the most important thing parents want to teach; in another, it might be communicating with one another, learning how to listen, and learning to respect each other. Children need to learn a little bit at a time, experts say. If dinnertime is an interesting time of day for your child, he is going to learn how to sit, and say, "How was your day?" and "What was the best thing that happened to you today?"

## Communication

Dinnertime is a time of respite from the hustle-bustle of everyday life. Your family can review the day that's passed and plan for the day that's coming.

## Teach by example

Divide tasks, so Mom or Dad alone are not responsible for preparing food, serving, and washing dishes. The chores and joys of feeding, nurturing and cleaning up should be shared. Don't discuss things that would embarrass or humiliate family members. Certain subjects children may want to discuss might require more compassion, or more individualized listening. Otherwise, there are no taboo topics.

## Build self-esteem

Dinner is a perfect opportunity to build self-esteem in children. By listening to what children have to say, you are saying, "I value what you do; I respect who you are and what you're doing; what you do is important to me." Mealtime can be looked at as an opportunity or as a chore. If it's viewed as an opportunity, then all sorts of possibilities are created; if it's viewed as a chore, then the possibilities don't exist. And it doesn't matter if the food is filet mignon, or pizza and salad.



## Seating

Parents should let children choose their own seats. If they fight over a favorite seat, help settle the dispute peacefully.

## Family dynamics

One parent may feed the kids early, with the intention of protecting the other parent from a raucous meal. But this actually can isolate the absent parent from family dynamics and create distance.

Certain scheduling conflicts cannot be avoided, but carving out family meal time on a regular basis can enhance family dynamics.

Excerpts from an article published in Stanford's Medicine on Children's Health.



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