

Day 19

Why Family Dinners are Important

Families are busier than ever, but making mealtime a priority in your home is so important! Today I'm sharing four reasons why family dinners are important and tips for finding time to sit around the table together.

If your family is like most American families, finding time for family dinners on a regular basis is a challenge. As children get older and your days are filled with more activities, finding time to sit together around the table isn't easy, but it's super important!

Three of my five kids are grown and either married or in college. I have two teens still at home and I can tell you, the time goes by so fast!



I honestly wish we had spent more time around the table than we did, but I have wonderful memories of family dinners and good food around the table. Those memories are priceless!

When my kids were younger, I spent a lot of time in the kitchen preparing meals and I'm so glad I took the time to do that.

The last couple of years have been tougher to find that time, but we eat most of our meals together – whatever that looks like and it's not always around the table, but it's almost always together where we talk, laugh, and communicate.

My kids are growing up so fast! Between music lessons, ice skating lessons, homeschooling our weeks are filled to the brim with things to do.

The one constant in every single day is that we have to eat. And since we have to eat, I want to eat good food. Like every day.

I want my kids to remember eating good food at home. And I want them to cherish memories of us sitting at the table together enjoying a delicious meal and fellowship together.

Unfortunately, for the average American family, meals are often eaten alone or in the car. Studies have shown that for the average American, one in every five meals is eaten in the car, at least one fast food meal is eaten every day, and families eat dinner together less than once a week.

Why Family Dinners are Important

1. When families eat together, kids tend to eat more fruits and vegetables. Families who eat dinner together are more likely to eat healthier and to encourage their children to make good food choices. This also means your kids will be less likely to be overweight.

However, if the television is on during dinner, kids are more likely to be overweight at a younger age. So turn off the television and spend time talking.

Obesity in children has become a real issue as nearly 1 in 5 adolescents are overweight which puts them at great risk for health issues later in life.

2. Families who eat together are more likely to engage with one another and talk to each other.

Sadly, many families today are disconnected from each other. It's not uncommon for everyone to stay in their own space inside their homes today.

Kids spend so much time on their electronic devices and unfortunately, mom and dad are guilty of doing the same!

Instead of talking face to face and having meaningful conversations, family communication is reduced to impersonal interactions.

I would strongly encourage you to turn off the television and insist everyone put away their electronic devices during family mealtimes. It may be a challenge – especially at first – but it's okay to insist and your kids will eventually understand that family time is important.

Memories are made easier when family members are not distracted. So many families are experiencing a disconnect from each other because of their connection to the online world. Mealtimes should be sacred family time. Guard that time by setting boundaries and simple rules. Sit together at the table.

The number one thing you can do to strengthen your relationship with your kids is to talk to them! Kids grow up so fast and taking time during the week to sit together around a table and share a family dinner is one of the best ways you can show your kids they are important.

Connecting around meal means that your kids will be more likely to share any problems they are struggling with and they are less likely to struggle with depression.

3. When families eat dinner together, kids are less likely to get involved in substance abuse. They are less likely to experiment with cigarettes, drugs, or alcohol.

Regular family dinners have a positive impact on their values, motivation, and self-esteem. Research shows that children who eat dinner with their family are more likely to understand and follow the boundaries and expectations their parents set.

Children who have a sense of belonging within the family unit are less likely to experience depression or have suicidal thoughts. They are more likely to believe that they have a support system when life is tough.

The dinner table gives us a sense of community and belonging within the family – and that’s important. Studies have shown that kids are more resilient in the face of bullying or other stressors when they eat meals with their families.

Cyberbullying relates to mental health and substance use problems in adolescents, even after their involvement in face-to-face bullying is taken into account. Although correlational, these results suggest that family dinners (ie, family contact and communication) are beneficial to adolescent mental health and may help protect adolescents from the harmful consequences of cyberbullying. – source:

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/1900477>



How to Find Time for Family Dinners

Some days are really busy and it can be hard to find time to prepare a delicious meal that pleases the whole family.

Keep it simple. Mealtime doesn't have to be difficult to pull together to be memorable. There are days when I feed my family on paper plates. Not every day but it does happen. And just because we sit at the table together doesn't mean I have to "set the table."

Most of the time I call my family to come to eat and they fix their plates in the kitchen and bring them into the dining room {or our dining area in the family room} to eat.

Simple also means that sometimes I serve my family prepared foods. Yes, cooking a homemade meal from

scratch is wonderful. But homemade doesn't have to mean complicated.

And sometimes letting the grocery store help you get a healthy meal on the table is okay.

You see, it's not the amount of time you spend cooking the perfect recipe or the flair with which you set the table. It's your smile along with comforting food that will mean the most to your family. Family is what it's really all about.

How to Make Family Dinners Fun

All of these benefits of family dinners only apply if the atmosphere around the table is warm, inviting, and engaging. Family meal times should be a time for laughter, good conversation, and catching up on the day.

Family meal time should be about sharing laughter and good food with people you love.

Mealtimes are an important part of family life. As a parent you need to be aware of how you are interacting with your children around the table and make sure that it's an enjoyable experience.

Family dinners are not the time for reprimanding your kids, have tense discussions, or controlling your kids behavior.

Yelling at your kids or your spouse during meal time is a sure-fire way to make all of these great benefits null and void.

It's important to make meal time fun and meaningful because that's where the real connection happens. Making family dinners fun isn't always easy – especially if your kids are younger or if you have really picky eaters or children who cry at the table a lot.

Just remember, kids don't stay little forever and the while the days are long, the years are short. So keep working to make family dinner in your home something special, because one day those kids will grow up and hopefully they'll look back at those moments around the table with fondness. A few ideas for making family dinner more fun:

- plan themed dinner nights
- serve at least one dish your children love
- keep food simple most night
- have a conversation jar with questions to ask during mealtime

Dinnertime is the perfect time to catch up with your family from the day. With work, school, and all of the other activities that keep you busy, it can be only time they have quality time together some days. Below you'll find 10 family conversation starters. You can find more in my shop at:

<https://shop.avirtuouswoman.org/collections/family-life/products/printable-family-dinner-conversation-starter-cards>

10 CONVERSATION STARTERS

MAKING FAMILY DINNERS MORE MEANINGFUL

How did you help another person today?

If you could trade places with your parents for a day, what would you do differently?

If you could have one dream come true, what would it be?

If you could pick your own name, what would you choose?

If you could be animal, what would you be and why?

Which book character best describes you and why?

If you could see your future, where will you be in ten years?

If you could be famous for a week, what would you be famous for and why?

If you could have any pet, what would you choose and why?

What is your favorite vacation memory?

Family Meals Around the Table

It's important to make meal time fun and meaningful because that's where the real connection happens.

How often do we eat together?

Are we making family meals a priority? Why or Why not?

What do I want my family to remember about mealtime?

How can I make mealtime more meaningful?
