

BUILDING HEALTHY FAMILIES

Life Lessons from the Family Table

The family table is a more than just a place to feed an appetite. Whenever family members gather at the table to share a meal, a growing child develops healthy lifestyle habits and social skills while nourishing emotional health. These side benefits from eating together around a table can fortify your child's sense of well-being for a lifetime.



Instructions on the Art of Conversation:

When sitting at a table, those seated around it are poised to exchange eye contact and facial expression. Young children included in table time discussions not only learn language skills. They learn to take turns and to read cues. At the same time, they are adopting appropriate non-verbal communication skills. These early lessons will help them make friends and thrive in social settings as well as provide a foundation for effective communication needed at school and in the work place .



Nourishment for the Body, Mind, and Spirit:

Regardless of family size, be it two or twelve, meals shared at the family table often provide healthier nutrients for growing brains and bodies, since those who prepare meals meant to be enjoyed by loved ones often use more fresh ingredients from multiple food groups than families get at a fast food restaurant or when they grab something from a convenience store or concession stand.

Topics of discussion around the table teach family values and engage developing brains in opportunities to learn how to effectively argue a point (debate), defend a cause (advocate), and share new knowledge with others (educate).

Much more than food and advice is apportioned within the context of a family meal. The table provides an ideal place to share joys, disappointments and dreams in the company of trusted relationships. Providing a regular, predictable, and safe place for wholesome exploration where everyone is valued is a daily essential ingredient needed for building a strong self-concept and the ability to bounce back from adversity.



Teaching Concepts:

A wealth of knowledge can be acquired in the family mealtime setting. It is around the table where a child can learn socially acceptable manners, such as courtesy and the expression of gratitude. It is a great place to increase a budding attention span necessary for lifelong learning and healthy development. The processes of passing, serving, and distributing teach sequencing which engages the brain in concentration. The concepts of "how much," "more," "that's enough," and "I'm full" support early learning as well. Young children exposed to adult conversations strengthen vocabulary and absorb lessons in grammar.



See the next page for:
Tips for Making the Most of Mealtime!

TIPS FOR MAKING THE MOST OF FAMILY MEALTIME:



- **Stick to a routine:**
 - As much as possible, set a time when everyone can be at the table together
 - Use assigned seats that make sense, so that everyone has an important place at the table, and it will be noticed when someone is missing
 - If necessary, make exceptions to the *time* you eat together, not where and how you eat a meal
- **Get everyone involved in preparations:**
 - Ask for ideas and favorites when preparing to shop for groceries
 - Young children can set the table, tear lettuce, and stir
 - Children are more likely to eat if they have a role in preparations
- **Use open-ended questions to start conversation or to avert sibling squabbles:**
 - Ask: what was the best/most difficult/funniest thing that happened today?
 - Ask: how would you fix that problem, if you could?
- **Encourage creativity and cooperation:**
 - Put at least one thing each child enjoys on the table each family meal
 - Allow children opportunities to pick a meal or side dish
 - Have a picnic on the floor, breakfast for dinner, a themed meal, or use candles and fancy dishes
- **Enjoy the money you will save by making meals at home!**

*Enjoy the
little
things in
life...*

*...one
day
you'll
look back
and
realize
they
were the
big
things.*

-Robert Breault

