

Rethinking Family Dinner - Children who eat dinner with their families have healthier diets, better manners, larger vocabulary, and higher self-esteem

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June 12, 2023



Coach Myrna May 30, 2023

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Most likely, you have heard research that shows that children who eat

dinner with their families have healthier diets, better manners, larger vocabulary, and higher self-esteem. They are also less likely to drink, smoke, do drugs, get pregnant, commit suicide, and develop eating disorders. But it turns out that it isn't about the dinner--it is about building relationships and strengthening connection within the family.

There are many ways to do this that do not involve dinner. Be creative and rethink the ritual.

- Can't get everyone together at dinner? Gather at 8 pm for dessert, a bedtime snack or just to share about the day.
- Weekdays too busy? Aim for a weekend. One family with adult married children and grandchild get together for a family breakfast once a month. This can be at someone's house, and it is a potluck, or it could be at a restaurant.
- Don't have time to cook? Try Leftover Mondays, Chinese Takeout Tuesdays, or breakfast for dinner.
- How about a Sunday lunch after church? Put something in the crockpot, throw together a salad and enjoy hanging out together.

In ***The Secrets of Happy Families***, author Bruce Feiler shares a very cool "10-50-1 formula" for improving your family meals. Here is what it means:

- 10 – Aim for ten minutes of quality talk per meal: usually, our conversations at the table are mostly about food and getting everyone fed (especially with small children): "Could I have more

water please?" or "Mama, Max took my tomato!". The quality talk involves reflecting on the day, talking about a topic, telling stories, sharing dreams and concerns and so on. That may sound like a time-consuming task, but according to research, ten minutes of substantial conversation is enough for mental and emotional benefits. So even if you are in a rush, you can do it.

- 50 – Let your kids speak at least half of the time: adults usually use up most of the ten minutes talking. But the whole point is to socialize with your children. So let them talk for half of the time. You can also practice your listening skills.
- 1 – Teach your kids one new word at every meal: "a large vocabulary is a great boost in life" – states Bruce Feiler. Children with large vocabulary perform better at school and succeed in life. Watch this TED talk by Dr Brenda Fitzgerald on her fascinating research on this topic! www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8qc8Aa3weE

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