



The Hearth Fire Series #78



Family Meals for a Happier Healthier Family

BLESS ✂

the food before us

THE FAMILY

beside us and

♡ **THE LOVE** ♡

between us

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Hearth Fire Lesson

TITLE: Family Meals for a Happier and Healthier Family

CATEGORY: Teaching Techniques

SUMMARY: Discover how the simple act of eating together greatly benefits you and your children and ways to meet the dinnertime challenges of everyday life.

AGENDA:

Welcome and Introductions 2-3 min.

Opening Activity	<i>See “Apple, Banana, Cherry” Idea #2 of Handout #4.</i>	<i>Page 12</i>	<i>7 min.</i>
Introduction to the lesson	<i>Discuss what research reveals</i>	<i>Page 4</i>	<i>5 min.</i>
Benefits of Family Meals for children, teens and adults		<i>Page 5</i>	<i>10 min.</i>
Enriching the Family Meal	<i>Additionally, choose a Handout to discuss: #2,3,4 (see pages below)</i>	<i>Page 6</i>	<i>7-10 min.</i>
Addressing the Challenges of Mealtime		<i>Page 7</i>	<i>10-15 min.</i>
Tips for Success	<i>Handout #1 Recipe for successful meals</i>	<i>Page 9</i>	<i>7-10 min.</i>

HANDOUTS:

Handout #1 RECIPE FOR SUCCESSFUL MEALS	page 9
Handout #2 FAMILY DINNER GAMES	page 10
Handout #3 DINNER PARTY GAMES	page 11
Handout #4 VIRTUAL DINNER TABLE GAMES	page 12
Handout #5 PLACEMAT POSSIBILITIES	page 13

(Placemat images can be found free on Google Images)



Family Meals for a Happier and Healthier Family



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Reference and Resources

- The Family Dinner project.org
- FMI- National Family Meals Month (September)
- Mississippi Extension Service - Dawn Vosbein, RD
- Kansas State University
- NAMI- Hearts and Minds Initiative
- Meals on the Spectrum: <https://www.mealtimesonthespectrum.org/>



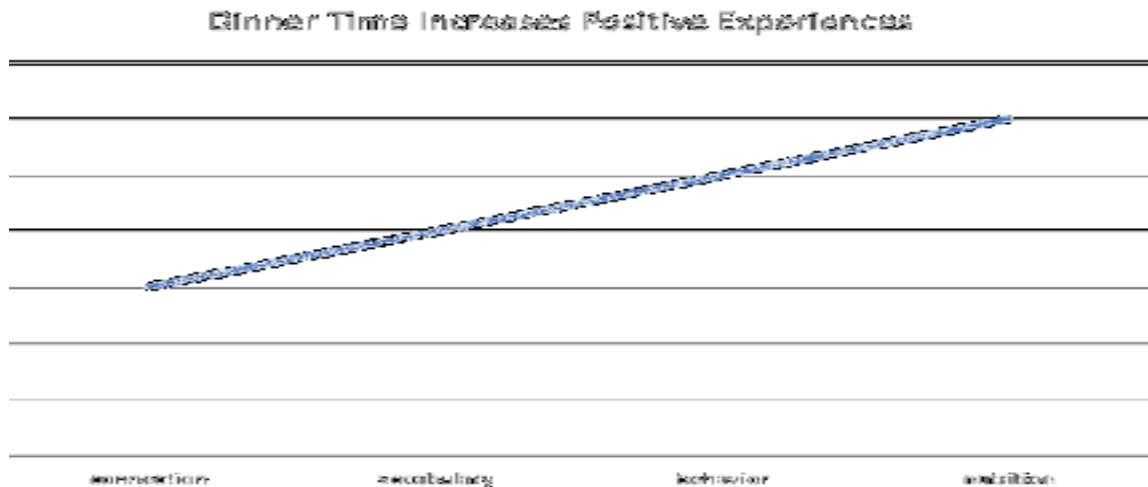


Family Meals for a Happier and Healthier Family

When is the last time you heard, “Time for dinner or breakfast is ready?”

Julia Child once said, "The dinner hour is a sacred, happy time when everyone should be together and relaxed." What memories do you have of family meals? There is a lot of research about family meals and the good they can do- and not just for your physical health!

Research Reveals:



- Families report feeling 70% more connected after eating.
- Children learn more new words around the table than being read aloud.
- An increase in academic performance among teens.
- 24% more likely to have better nutrition.
- 80% of teens want to eat with their families more often.

Look at these lists of benefits. In what ways have you seen these benefits? How is that meals can provide these boosts to our lives?



Benefits of Family Meals for Children and Teens

- Improves literacy, language development and storytelling skills.
- Improves Academic performance.
- Improves overall nutrition and eating patterns.
- Decreases likelihood of overweight and obesity.
- Improves self-esteem.
- Lessens likelihood of substance abuse and other high risk teen years.

Benefits of Family Meals for Adults

- Adults who eat with others (kids or not) tend to eat more fruits and vegetables and less fast food.
- Parents who dine with their kids have less binge-eating and dieting.
- Frequent family meals are associated with better mental health for parents.
- Mealtime can lower rates of stress and depressive symptoms for both children and parents.

To get the most from a family meal, consider the following list based on research.
What do you already do? What could you add?

Enriching the Family Meal: Ways to make Meals more Beneficial.



- Turn off television and other media.
Consider putting a “tech” basket in the kitchen for all devices.
Even if no one is watching the TV, the sound will interfere with conversations.
- Increase the meal quality.
Make some changes to current recipes; add different spices or side dishes.
Explore new recipes from different countries or parts of the country.
Buy products at a farmer’s market.
- Increase meal duration.
Try some conversation starters or game ideas. (See handouts)
Slow down!
- Model and discuss healthy eating habits.
Young children are sponges and will enjoy learning about what foods are made of.
- Improve the atmosphere.
Decide to discuss difficult topics at a different time of the day.
Add relaxing or fun music in background.
Add candlelight.
Make it an occasion. Fondue night, Dinner on the porch, Theme Dinners

Ideas for making your meals mindful and meaningful include the following:

- Remove distractions.
- Slow down.
- Practice mindfulness while eating. (See resource list to learn more)
- Talk about your family’s traditions.

Dinnertime is, of course, meant to be a rewarding time together as Julia Child and others have proclaimed; however, many challenges threaten the family dinner.

Below is a list of some of these challenges and ideas for overcoming them.



1. You have the challenge of balancing family meals with extracurricular activities and job demands.
 - Be intentional about family time. Don't give up on it.
 - Family meals don't have to be a complete, gourmet dinner. (See ideas for "Limited time to Prepare.")
 - Make it a convenient location; meals can be a picnic at a park, field, or in your yard.
 - Make the most of your limited time together. Be prepared ahead of time with preparation and conversation ideas.
2. You must balance the duties of watching children and preparing a meal.
 - Involve children in the preparation.
 - Make it a learning moment teaching about foods, sparking an interest in culinary arts or following a recipe.
 - Have toys or crayons nearby for children to play at the table.
 - While making one meal, do some prep for the next. This will free up time for a future meal and you will be able to spend more time with your child.
3. Your preparation time is limited.
 - Look into doing frozen batch meals.
Doing these with friends makes this task more enjoyable.
 - Look up Slow Cooker meals.
 - Make Sheet pan or Air fryer meals.
 - Make Salads with meats: chicken salad, taco salad.
 - Remember, the point is to be together. Make the meal simple if necessary.
 - Consider take-out when necessary. It is still a meal together!



4. Picky eaters and challenged eaters are in your home.

- First, don't let this scare you!!
- Second, rule out underlying issues with your doctor.
- Decide what decisions you will make about the meal and what decisions you will allow your child(ren) to make. More ideas about sharing decision making at “Mealtimes on the Spectrum” on the web. (See website in resources.)
- Involve kids in cooking and shopping.
- Serve favorites alongside new foods. Start with small portions of the new food.
- Start off mealtime with a positive perspective with the experience.
- Be patient and persistent.
- Consider different ways to fix the necessary foods.
- Consider allowing a portion of the mealtime to be about what the child would enjoy building the together time.

5. Teenagers are reluctant to participate in family activities in your home.

- Involve them in the decision making of meals.
- Schedule family dinners so it has a predictable time. Even if it changes from day to day, make sure the time is communicated. In times of uncertainty, knowing that dinner will be on the table at the end of each day can help us focus on what's important, connect with our loved ones, and allow us to practice daily gratitude.
- Don't force your teen to talk and look up ideas of how you can encourage conversations in a supportive way. For example, start with your own stories.
- Consider pulling out some card games.
- Add creativity and spontaneity: the location, the meals, the table set up.
- Allow them to invite friends over.



Handout #1 RECIPE FOR SUCCESSFUL MEALS

- What are the ways you prepare successful meals?
 - What ideas below do you implement?
 - What can you add to your routine?
1. Family mealtimes at specified times gives kids a timeline for their day and activities. They set up a routine that gives them security and something to look forward to. Regular meals teach kids that punctuality shows respect for others in the family.
 2. Daily chores associated with mealtimes teach responsibility and a connection to the family.
 3. Have a preferred way to collect recipes.
 4. Use myplate.gov for healthy meal ideas.
 5. Spend time looking for recipes, get inspired.
Notebook, Internet recipe apps, Pinterest
 6. Start a calendar, write down or print it out for your notebook.
 7. Have a theme night.
Taco Tuesday, Pasta Dinner, Soup night, BBQ and remember meals do not have to be at the dining room table. Picnic, eat in the living room, outside, on the porch, have breakfast for dinner.
 8. Coordinate ingredients each week to save money.
Have roasted chicken one night and then use the leftover chicken for enchilada casserole later in the week or chicken noodle soup.
 9. Try these busy day solutions: Do take out, pick up a grilled chicken, fix leftovers, or make something easy like eggs and toast!
 10. Solicit help with recipe ideas, food prep and clean-up.
Everyone in the family can contribute, which includes setting the table, and working as a family to clean-up.
 11. Choose a shopping day, make a list for a week of planned meals. Order groceries online for delivery or pick-up the next day.
 12. Plan for leftovers and be strategic about freezing.
Double recipes of soup, and casseroles; freeze them for future meal.
 13. Keep your pantry well-stocked.
 14. Plant an herb or vegetable garden for fresh and easy to get ingredients!

Handout #2 FAMILY DINNER GAMES

By: Andrew Saladino

We know that family dinner nights aren't always sunshine and rainbows. When you're in a rut, dinner time can turn into a redundant nightly event. You cook, you serve, you eat, you clean, and the night is over. But it doesn't have to be this way. Since dinner is already part of your family's daily schedule, it's a great opportunity to add the element of play!

1. SWITCH

This game is super easy to play and only requires a minute of preparation time. Write everyone's names on a piece of paper and throw them in a bowl. Before your family sits down for dinner, ask everyone to draw a name. Everyone then must sit in the other person's regular seat and act like them during the dinner. You can also write characters from your favorite show, animals, or family members that aren't present on the tags and impersonate them during dinner.

2. THE GRATITUDE SANDWICH

If you're not really in the mood to play a game, this little gratitude round is the perfect way to put a positive spin on your day. Everyone gets to tell the group two good things that happened that day and one thing that wasn't so great. Make sure to say one of the good things first, then talk about something that you didn't like, and end with another positive event that happened to make the story a sandwich that's easy to digest!

3. PRINTABLE TABLE PLACEMATS

If your kids have a difficult time sitting still at the table, either waiting for food to be served or for everyone to finish their meal, we have something for them! Print out cute placemats and give your kids a colored pencil to find their way through the maze. Google “free placemats for kids” to get ideas.

4. WHAT'S COOKING?

This game is fun when your kids are a little bit older and have the vocabulary to describe different ingredients. Ask everyone at the table to guess the list of ingredients that are in the meal being served. You can just shout out the ingredients you think the cook used or give everyone a legal pad to make notes of what they think is in the meal.



Handout #3 DINNER PARTY GAMES



If you're hosting a dinner party, having a few games ready is never a bad idea! Whether it's a quick ice breaker to get things going, a fun way to introduce everyone to get acquainted, or a game that keeps your guests hooked all night—we've compiled a list of the best dinner party games, so you're prepared!

1. GUESS WHO

Write a fictional or real character/person on a sticky note and put it on the person's forehead who's sitting to your right. One person starts asking yes or no questions to find out who they are. If the group answers no, the next person gets to ask questions.

2. MURDER MYSTERY GAME

If you have some time on your hands to plan a more elaborate dinner party and know your guests will enjoy dressing up and playing a character all night—a murder mystery is the perfect game for you! The premise is simple: someone got killed and the murderer is among you. Find out who committed the crime by asking the right questions. You can purchase murder mystery game

3. TWO TRUTHS, ONE LIE

This game is great if your guests don't know each other too well and you want to introduce everyone in a fun way. Everyone must share two true facts about themselves and make up one lie. For example, you could share that you're a nurse, play piano, and like to play board games. Now the rest of the group must find out whether you lied about your job, musical talent, or hobby!

Go around the table until everyone's lie has been debunked!

Hand out #4 VIRTUAL DINNER TABLE GAMES

Spending quality time with friends and family is important, but we know that it's not always possible to get everyone you love in the same room together. That's why we're grateful for video calls! If you're planning to host a virtual dinner party or maybe have a regularly scheduled virtual dinner with your family, here are a few games that you can play in person or long distance!

1. TRIVIA NIGHT

You don't have to visit your local bar to partake in trivia dinner night! Create your own trivia questions or find free ones online to host a fun virtual game night with friends or family. You can write them down by hand, read them to the group and rely on an honor's system where everyone records their own scores. If you'd like to put together a more elaborate game, you can create a presentation with all the questions and share your screen with the group.

2. APPLE, BANANA, CHERRY!

If you have regular virtual dinners with your family and want to keep the kids engaged, try this game: pick a theme like fruits, vegetables, things in the kitchen, or drinks. Start with the letter A and go around the (virtual) table working through the alphabet with a word that starts with each letter. For example, apples, banana, cherry, dragon fruit, etc.

The best part of this game is that only one person at a time will speak, which makes the virtual dinner experience much smoother than a lot of people talking over each other.

3. 20 QUESTIONS

The best part about this game is that you never know where it's going to take you. One person must come up with a place, person, animal, or really anything they can think of. The rest of the group now must ask questions the person can answer with "yes" or "no" to find out what thing, person, or place they were thinking of. The group gets 20 questions to solve the riddle.

4. LAUGH OUT LOUD

Finally, this is a cute game to get everyone out of their shells. Appoint a "laugh master" whose job it is to make other people on the call laugh! For every giggle, cackle, or full-on belly laughter the "laugh master" gets a token. You can pass the torch around, so everyone gets the chance to make the rest of the group laugh.

It's so easy to make a regular meal with family or a dinner party with friends more entertaining. If you want to raise the stakes, make a pact that whoever loses game night has to take care of the dishes!



