



Family Information

Family Style Dining

Making Mealtimes Fun

Conversations at the Table

You've managed to prepare a nutritious meal and gather your family around the table. Now what? To help maximize the benefits of a family meal, here are some suggestions:

***Keep the conversation light.** This is supposed to be a fun, relaxing time for the family, so avoid topics that are unpleasant or stressful. If there is something negative that needs to be discussed, find an alternate time.

***Focus on the positive.** Some families have such limited time together that they fall into the trap of using "family time" as an excuse to criticize or complain. Steer clear of negativity, even in general topics, and emphasize the good or happy moments from the day.

***Catch up on the day.** Now is a wonderful time to reconnect with your family and find out what is going on in their lives. It is also a great time to capitalize on 'teachable moments' - situations that encourage discussion on important and/or academic topics. If your child consistently answers with "nothing" or "I don't know," try asking more open-ended or opinion based questions, such as "what was the best thing about today" and ask less "why" or "yes/no" questions.

***Prepare for upcoming events.** General family reminders concerning trips or appointments are good topics - nagging about finishing homework and remembering to clean their rooms are not.

***Take turns.** Be sure that everyone has a chance to talk and that no one is monopolizing the conversations, which includes you! Keep in mind, peaceful silence is better than a tense table.

Introducing Manners and Responsibilities

Powerful learning comes through modeling and imitation, which can easily be found during a family meal. Children learn about nutrition, trying new foods, and family culture through the foods you serve and they also learn social skills and family values through conversations that occur. Another area that can be capitalized on during this time is manners. It is never too early to start teaching the basics because the

teaching simply involves watching you act appropriately. To begin, you must decide which rules are important for your family and which ones are not. For instance, some parents feel no one should leave the table until everyone is finished. Others place importance on being sure to say 'please' and 'thank you.' Decide what you want to see at your table and show your family what is acceptable behavior. With younger children, keep in mind that some behaviors are completely age appropriate such as spitting, and throwing utensils. Knowing when to ignore and when to advise with a simple but firm, "we don't do that at the table" will depend on the situation as well as the child. When in doubt, ask your pediatrician. Allowing children to have responsibilities related to the family meal is also important. Many times,

parents feel too rushed or tired to let children help, but there are always tasks that your child can do. These responsibilities, however trivial, show your child that they are a valuable member of the family and develop self-pride and self-worth. Also, the earlier they get accustomed to helping, the easier it will be in their teen years!

Ways Your Child Can Help

- They can clear and wipe off the table where the meal will take place.
- They can decorate the table with flowers they have picked or drawings they have made; older children can make place mats and/or name tags.
- They can set the table, with or without assistance.
- They can help with minor food preparations, such as pouring drinks or preparing salad.
- They can help set the mood by turning off the television, choosing soft music, and inviting others to come and eat.
- They can help clear the table after the meal, put dishes in sink, place items in refrigerator, and wipe off the table.



Want more tips and ideas for enjoyable mealtimes?

Try these websites:

www.parentworld.com

www.healthychild.net

<http://life.familyeducation.com>

www.scholastic.com