



Set the Table for Your Family

Try these simple tips to help your family eat together more often.

*Nobody gets to "opt out" of dinner.
Each one of us is important.*

- Add one more family meal to your week. If dinnertime is too busy, try breakfast or lunch on the weekend. Aim for four or more times a week, but be patient with yourself and your family in getting there.
- Make it a priority. Be flexible about when and where you eat.

- Be your child's best role model. If you drink milk, your child probably will, too. If your child watches you enjoy an unfamiliar vegetable, your child will try new foods. If you show respect and good manners, your child will learn from your example.

On Sundays I look at everyone's schedules and pick the nights that everyone can eat together. It doesn't have to be the same time each day because we're all busy.



Cook Together

- Let everyone choose a favorite dish or menu during the week. They'll know that their opinions matter.

I put a list of the week's menus on the fridge. On certain days I write what my kids can do to help before I get home from work.

- When planning dinner, use MyPyramid.gov as a guide. Include at least one serving from each of the five food groups: vegetable, fruit, milk, grain, and meat & beans. Go easy on sweets and high-fat foods.
- Show kids that the kitchen is an exciting place where they can see science, art, and magic in action. Children are proud to say, "I made it myself!"

I got a sturdy step-stool so my daughter could see the counter and help me fix dinner.



Talk Together

- Keep conversation happy and relaxed. Give everyone a chance to talk. Laugh, tell stories, ask about the day. Save serious discussions and discipline for a separate, non-meal time.
- Eat around a table. It's easier to talk and listen when you face each other.

My partner and I like to linger at the table over tea and dessert. The kids see by example that the table is an enjoyable place to be.

- Help kids become thoughtful listeners. They can learn to ask questions and appreciate different opinions.
- Turn off the TV, cell phones, and other electronics so you can focus on having fun with each other.

We used to have the TV at the end of the table...I realized I knew more about the people in the show than my own kids. We moved the TV to the living room and we talk more now.



Celebrate Together

- Develop a routine to start and end the meal. Some families light a candle, turn on music, give thanks, or hold hands. Wait until everyone is done to be excused.

On Fridays my boys and I always have pizza. It's our tradition to be glad that it's the end of a week of school and work, and helps us connect before the weekend starts.

- Try recipes that reflect your cultural heritage or that use local foods. Experiment with new ideas from friends or neighbors.

My mom didn't cook much so I don't have any family recipes. I taught myself to cook, and now we have some favorite recipes that we all enjoy.

- Bring something special to the table: children's art, a school paper, a flower found on a walk.
- Eat slowly so everyone can enjoy the food and conversation.