

Eating Smart & Moving More Celebrating Healthy Families

Eating Smart

Five Easy Ways to Enjoy Mealtime Conversations

Family mealtimes really matter – to children and to adults. More positive mealtime experiences mean more family communication, improved performance at school, enhanced reading levels and healthier weights for children. Here are five easy ways to improve your family's conversations around the table.

Create a relaxed atmosphere.

Quality conversations require a calming atmosphere – with minimal distractions. This means turning off the TV and radio news programs. It also means setting aside cell phones (except for emergency calls, of course). Music can be a nice addition – if it is calm, peaceful, and played at a low volume.

Focus on laughter and learning.

Meals are generally not good times to discuss difficult or stressful issues. They are wonderful times to share funny stories and to learn new views on current events. Make a family pledge to focus only on the positive at the mealtimes. Save disciplinary matters and problems for another time of day.

Respect and involve every family member.

Even very small children want to be part of the conversation. Make a good effort to engage everyone at the table. Be patient with those who take longer to express an idea. Actively seek out the opinions of those who tend to be quieter. Sometimes it helps to go around the table person-by-person.

Use conversation starters.

Tired of conversations that end after a minute or two? Conversation starter cards may be just what your family needs to keep things lively at the table. Place cards in a small bowl or cup in the center of your table. Take turns choosing the card at a meal. Read the question and let the conversation begin! If you run out of steam with one topic, choose another card. Create your own conversation cards or look for ideas at www.tvland.com/familytable/ft_conversation.jhtml.

Enjoy different viewpoints.

Promoting positive conversations doesn't mean that everyone has to agree on everything. Establish a few ground rules – like no teasing, criticizing, rude comments about other people or talking while someone else is talking. Listen thoughtfully to each other. Help children learn to appreciate differences.



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