

Family Meals -The Real Value Meal



Let's do dinner. **Have regular "Family Meal Days"—A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children.** Eating dinner with your kids is a simple and effective way to stay involved in your children's lives. Families that eat together regularly stay closer and more connected.

Why are family meals important? More frequent family meals are associated with less substance use, fewer depressive symptoms, later initiation of sexual activity, less suicide involvement and better grades.

Meals are a great time to play "follow the leader" - set a smart example. Eating with parents is also an important factor for the nutrition and eating habits of adolescents. Research shows that family meals are associated with higher intakes of fruits, vegetables and dairy products. Adolescents who report frequent family meals are also more likely to have a healthy weight and less likely to develop disordered eating habits.

With today's busy lifestyles it can be a challenge to eat meals together. These tried and true strategies can make it easier.



- ✓ **Make family mealtime a priority.** Schedule family meals for the week and write them on the calendar. If you know you can't have a family dinner, make a date for a family breakfast.
- ✓ **Keep it simple.** Tuna sandwiches with sliced fruit can be made in minutes. Pasta and bottled spaghetti sauce with salad and bread make a great 30 minute meal.
- ✓ **Get kids involved.** Have them help with washing fruits and vegetables, setting the table or stirring ingredients. As they get older, ask them to be responsible for making one meal a month.
- ✓ **Be creative and flexible about when and where you eat.** You may decide to bring a picnic to the park near the soccer practice field. Or you may decide to have dinner later than the "normal" dinnertime so everyone can eat together.
- ✓ **Make mealtime fun for every one.** This is not a time to lecture or discipline. Keep conversations light and pleasant. Talk about the events of the day or daily news. Practice being a good listener. This is a great way to gain insight on how your kids think and what their interests are. For example....."If you had three wishes what would they be?"
- ✓ **Eliminate interruptions and distractions.** No TV, no radio, no phone calls, let the answering machine pick-up.
- ✓ **Keep it a ritual.** The meals during the week may change time, place and attendance. But try to have at least one meal that becomes a family ritual. For example, making various kinds of pancakes for Saturday breakfast each week will be a time that the entire family looks forward to and remembers fondly in years to come.

Check out www.mealsmatter.org for more ideas!



NORTHERN KENTUCKY
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