

## Dinner Table Conversations

### Conversations at the dinner table

Families sitting around the dinner table, eating, and conversing, a staple that depicted the American home in the 1950's. However, within the last 30-40 years, family therapist and executive director of the Family Dinner Project, Anne Fishel, has noted a decrease in families sharing a meal together. Due to busy lives, only about 30% of families manage to regularly share a meal.

The benefits of enjoying a family meal go far beyond quality time. Conversations around the dinner table have a way of bonding families together. From sharing highlights, failures, and sentiments about the day, it is a great opportunity for open dialogue between both parents and children. Studies indicate that dinner conversations can be a great tool to build vocabulary in children, as they are more likely to learn new words through conversation versus hearing a book read out loud. A bigger vocabulary can lead to stronger reading skills and a healthier approach to challenging words.

In addition to improved literacy, Anne Fishel goes on to say that "there have been more than 20 years of dozens of studies that document that family dinners are great for the body, the physical health, the brains and academic performance, and the spirit or the mental health, and in terms nutrition, cardiovascular health is better in teens." Cooking at home, tends to be healthier as less sugar, preservatives and fillers are added to the food. Plus, there is a greater likelihood of having protein, vegetables and fruit in the meal which allow for a well-balanced diet.

With the influx of mental health issues troubling our teens, eating healthier and going back to family dinners can assist in managing the illness. When surveyed, teenagers ranked eating dinner as a family, a top priority on their list. 80% of teens mentioned that during family dinners, they are more likely to engage in conversation with their parents. According to Anne Fishel, "regular family dinners are associated with lower rates of depression, and anxiety, and substance abuse, and eating disorders, and tobacco use, and early teenage pregnancy, and higher rates of resilience and higher self-esteem." While being glued to a phone or tablet might be more convenient, perhaps setting them aside to engage in conversation with the above in mind, can strengthen a parent-child relationship.

When being purposeful and taking the time to engage in conversation during dinner time, opportunities that could be missed in the busyness of life, can now be seized. Children love to share what is on their mind and the more that parents cultivate that gift, the more they will grow in it and activate it as adults. Children need to feel like they are being heard, and while that doesn't negate or dismiss the fact that parents should correct and discipline, it should be of importance to cultivate an atmosphere of trust. For a child to share emotions, thoughts or perceptions with a parent requires vulnerability and should be reciprocated by the parent with their full attention. When there is transparency and open dialogue in the home, children will have an easier time finding answers to their questions. Their home, instead of the world, becomes their safe haven.

Finding the time to cook for dinner and thinking of topics to discuss can be challenging for some families. Nevertheless, there are great tips on [thefamilydinnerproject.org](http://thefamilydinnerproject.org) that provide

30-minute dinner recipes and tips for table talk. Whether you are a parent or not, setting a precedence to make family dinner a priority, can produce great benefits for you and your family now and later in life. Till the next time.....

Your Mommy-Friend,  
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