

WHY MEALS@HOME?

Over the past 15 years, research has shown what parents have known for a long time: Sharing a fun family meal is good for the spirit, brain, and health of all family members. Recent studies link regular family meals with the kinds of behaviors that parents want for their children: higher grade-point averages, resilience, and self-esteem. From a Christian's perspective, this also means children are more likely to internalize what it means to be a follower of Christ because this simple act will help nourish spiritual growth. Additionally, family meals are linked to lower rates of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, eating disorders, and depression.

Family meals give us...

- **A place to belong:** Healthy children receive their sense of identity from church and home. At church, the communion table is the central activity uniting believers in Christ. At home, mealtime is the central event reminding each person that they have a place in the family. Both rituals yank us out of solitude and isolation and reconnect us to those with whom we have an intimate, God-ordained bond.
- **A moment of sanity:** Gathering from the alienation of separate activities provides a much needed moment of sanity because every time we eat together, we corporately acknowledge our dependence upon the provider of all life-sustaining gifts. Hunger pangs draw us together and to God.
- **A rhythm for health:** Studies show that when families eat together, they enjoy spiritual, emotional and physical benefits. When eating with others we are more likely to eat balanced meals and avoid over-indulgence. Conversation during family meals helps us plan and pace our eating while creating a regular occasion for connection.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Patterns of modern life can make family meals the exception rather than the norm. Some of us can't imagine a Meals@Home routine due to work schedules, extensive business travel or children involved in a variety of extracurricular activities. Establishing and protecting the family table will require making difficult, counter-culture choices. If a daily routine is impossible, take baby steps by establishing a pattern of at least three family meals per week, even if you eat at a restaurant or bring food home.

GOING FURTHER

FREE AUDIO: The Meals@Home audio presentation features a variety of parents sharing ideas on how to establish and enhance the family meal routine. Instructions to download the FREE podcast are available in your Meals@Home kit. Click on the QR code or pick up a CD copy of the presentation in the Faith@Home Center.



Recipe Cards: A variety of FREE mealtime discussion "recipe cards" are included in the kit. Additional recipe cards can be picked up in the Faith@Home Center or downloaded at www.norfolkccoc.org/mealshome (qr code below).

Dinner Conversation Starters: We have created a jar full of questions that will get your family talking. For each meal you spend together randomly select a question from the jar. Some questions are silly while others may be serious. You can pick up a jar at the "Faith@Home" center.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

Available for check out in the Faith@Home Center.

- **THE SURPRISING POWER OF FAMILY MEALS** by Miriam Weinstein is filled with insights and practical ideas for making mealtime special.
- **DINNER TABLE DEVOTIONS** by Nancy Guthrie provides short faith reflections designed for use around the dinner table.
- **THE HOUR THAT MATTERS MOST** by Les and Leslie Parrott with Stephanie Allen and Tina Kuna examines the surprising power of the family meal.

WEB RESOURCES TO GET THE FAMILY TALKING!
aroundthetablegames.com
familydinnergames.com



Faith@Home
Building Strong Families
www.norfolkccoc.org/faithathome



MEALS @HOME

STOP. EAT. CONNECT.



PREPARING MEALS@HOME

While not every family meal will be home-cooked, part of its power comes from the preparation process, including...

- **Eager Anticipation:** The time and effort invested in preparing the meal creates a sense of anticipation. The sights, sounds and smells of cooking launch a ritual everyone knows will culminate together around the table.
- **Memorable Aromas:** When adults smell foods that remind them of their childhood, they are taken back to that place and time. Smells can do that to us more than any of the other four senses. The fragrances wafting from an oven, pan or crockpot create lasting, positive memories by making home a place we want to be.
- **Dignifying Roles:** When we assign children a task in the process of preparing the meal (i.e. stirring the pot, chopping vegetables, setting the table, cleaning the dishes, etc.), we give them a sense of belonging that comes from fulfilling an important role in the family.

RULES FOR MEALS@HOME

Family meals will be more fun if you follow several simple rules...

- **Give Thanks:** Before diving in, the family should pause to give thanks to God as a regular reminder of our dependence upon His grace and goodness.
- **No Media:** A key goal of the Meals@Home routine is to foster good conversation. Sitting at the table facing one another provides a natural context for interaction. Turn off the television, cell phones, PDAs, iPods and all other forms of media.
- **Spill Chill:** To avoid frustration and disappointment, you should expect at least one spill during every family meal. Rather than lose your cool when Junior knocks over his glass of milk, use it as a reminder that we are all imperfect human beings. Don't let the inevitable mishap spoil the entire meal.
- **Heed Manners:** The dinner table provides an ideal setting to reinforce basic manners such as how to carry on respectful conversation, looking others in the eyes when speaking to them, swallowing food before talking, saying "please" and "thank you" and many other basic rules of civilized interaction.

Conversation During Meals@Home

Mealtime conversation should be something everyone looks forward to rather than a place to discuss problems or give correction. Sometimes good conversation requires a creative nudge. Try these simple ideas to encourage both informal chat and intentional faith conversation...

JUST FOR FUN

High/Low: An easy way to trigger informal conversation and learn about everyone's day is to invite anyone to say "High/Low" during the meal. The person to the right of whoever says "High/Low" is required to share the low point of his/her day followed by the high point of his/her day. For example, Mom might share getting a speeding ticket as her low but learning of Junior's good grade as her high. Dad might share getting stuck in traffic as his low but kissing Mom as his high. You might be amazed at what you discover about everyone's day using this simple game. The things you discover can also be used as things to prayer over.

At Your Age: Invite each child to ask Mom or Dad about what their life was like at the child's age. A seven-year-old might ask, for example, "What was your favorite TV show when you were my age." Turning the tables, parents can ask children to describe what they think their life will be like at Mom's or Dad's age. Dad might ask, for example, "What kind of car will you drive when you are a dad?"

Prompt Questions: Have a list of questions on hand to prompt interesting conversation and help your family relate to one another better. Pick up a FREE Meals@Home "Dinner Conversation Starters" jar from the Faith@Home Center. New questions will be available in the center each month.

Child's Choice Night: Let a child participate in planning and creating a mealtime experience. Teach them to cook one meal they can prepare every week, or let them help plan fun menu changes such as "eat dessert first" or "eat all red foods."

INTENTIONAL FAITH TALKS

Any Age: There are a variety of questions to help prompt faith-related discussion. Some examples...

- What Bible story or lesson did you learn at church this past weekend?
- Name a favorite Bible character and tell their story.
- If God wrote you a letter, what topic would He address and what would He say? • God knows our future. What do you hope He sees for your future at age ____?

Older Kids: Pick an age appropriate topic to discuss from a Christian perspective. Don't worry whether you have all of the answers. The important thing is to make conversation about the truth a natural part of family life. Suggested topics include...

- Why does it really matter whether Jesus Christ literally rose from the dead? (See 1 Corinthians 15:3-19)
- What is Satan's most powerful weapon against us? (See John 8:44)
- Why should we treat every human being with dignity? (See Genesis 1:27-28)

Memorize Together: Select something to memorize together as a family, spending 1-2 minutes per mealtime with the goal of memorizing something substantial over a 120-day period. Suggestions include...

- The books of the Bible in order
- The Lord's Prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13
- The Ten Commandments listed in Exodus chapter 20 or Deuteronomy 5
- The Fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23
- Passages from lessons being learned during Bible class.

Read Aloud: Select a book of the Bible to read through over a 120-day period by reading a few verses each meal. If children are old enough, invite them to take turns reading aloud. A great place to start would be the Gospel of Mark or 1 John.