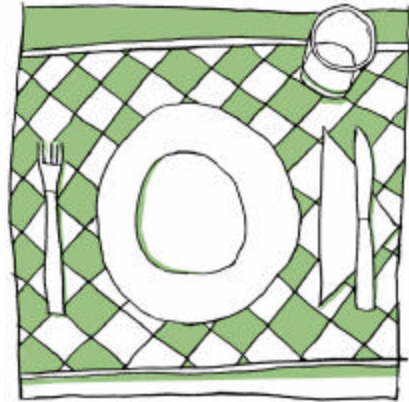


Making Meal Time Special



Traditionally, the family mealtime has been a symbol of communication. Experts say if you want to know how a family really interacts, watch them at the table. Is everyone present? Are they engaged in conversation or preoccupied with newspapers and the television? They say that the majority of family conversations happen either in the car or at the table. It's true for us, is it true for you?

Eating is an important part of family life, no matter how busy we are. In her book, *New Traditions*, Susan Abel Lieberman writes, "The busier we are, the more important it is that we make sure there is special family time. It is not enough to think family is important; it must be important. What we do is the visible expression of our real values. What we do, however, does not have to be done to someone else's time clock." Eating together on a regular basis and making it special provides a marvelous opportunity to celebrate family time.

Activities

Making meals special doesn't mean bringing in circus acts, it means creating an atmosphere of blessing and communication. Here are some ways that families have made mealtime a special family time:

Blessings

Use mealtime prayers as a way of teaching your children to recognize that God is the creator and sustainer of life. Prayers can be ones you write as a family, a traditional favorite, a spontaneous one, or a song. Mealtime prayers provide an opportunity for children to practice praying publicly. Try rotating the leadership role. Don't hesitate to pray when guests are present, rather welcome them into your family's rituals.

Home Alone

Pick a regular night once a week when everyone will be present for dinner with no guests invited. This means making a family commitment to not working late, attending meetings or after school activities. Make sure everyone has a task to perform in the planning, preparation and/or cleaning.

Centerpieces

Create table centerpieces. They can be made of anything such as flowers, an arrangement of small toys or dolls, or an art project. If possible, create them together from family activities such as nature walks.

Weekend Cookoff

Can't get together for supper? Create a Saturday or Sunday morning cook-off. Prepare a full meal (such as a casserole, muffins, and dessert) or a couple of main dishes to be eaten later in the day and/or week. Select recipes and ingredients in advance. Make sure everyone has a task in the planning, preparation and/or cleaning. Consider ending with a brief blessing of the food. That spaghetti sauce eaten alone after soccer practice will taste "better" if its prepared at the Cookoff.

Weekly Rituals

Whether its Friday Pizza Night or Tuesday Sundaes, they're fun to look forward to! One family we know, short on preparation time and cooking skill, uses restaurants as a regular place to catch up on each other's lives.

Feed the Hungry

If food is important to your family, then you can understand the feelings of those who go hungry. Many of us participate in programs to feed the hungry during the holidays, thus it is especially important to support these programs in the "off season". Many churches offer opportunities for families to help prepare and serve a meal at a local meal program. How about at your next family get-together asking families to bring canned goods for each member of their family? Later take the food to a local food bank or shelter. Another suggestion is to make a simple supper, eliminate dessert or those Sunday donuts, and as a family determine a local charity to donate the money.