

Break bread and stay connected

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Okay, I know you are busy, but this one can't wait. Why have family dinners fallen to the wayside? Are we all so overly scheduled that we can't even eat with our families? Doesn't everyone have to eat? Even if you can only spare 15 minutes for dinner, it is really important for your family to sit down and eat together **at least three** times a week.

In my house, the only reason we don't eat dinner together is if one of the kids is at a friend's house. This is one rule we live by and I don't break it for anything. Dinner time is sacred time.

Here are some tips on how to make it effortless:

- Try to eat dinner at the same time every night. Even if it's only for 15 minutes, making this "appointment" with your family carves out time in everyone's crazy schedules to take a break and be with each other. Stick to this and your family will begin to look forward to the time together.

- If your kids have practices at different times, say 4 p.m., 6 p.m. and 7 p.m., try to coordinate dinner for 5:15 p.m.

- If you have a child who comes home from practice and has to eat by him/herself, make sure you or your spouse/partner sits with him/her so you can swap stories about each of your days.

- Plan meals ahead of time so dinner runs like clock work. I whip out the crock pot when I know we have a busy day and night ahead. I make things like spaghetti sauce, taco meat and fillings for lettuce wraps. The aroma welcomes everyone who comes home from a hectic day of school or work.

- If you can't get dinner on the table, bring it home or have it delivered. Whether it's store bought or fast food, someone put some effort into making it. Treat it like any other dinner at the table.

- Turn off the t.v., video games, ipods and anything else that will inhibit conversation.

- Put out a pitcher of water so no one has to get up for something to drink in the middle of dinner. Have each family member bring their own cup to the table.



- Initiate conversation by asking each member of the family, including adults to talk about something that they remember from their day. Encourage them to express themselves about the good and the bad. While each family member speaks, everyone else is required to listen and not interrupt.

- If it's Friday night, encourage your teen to still have dinner with you. There will always be exceptions, but try to keep in the habit of having a meal with your teen especially if they are going out with friends that night. Why not invite their friends over for dinner every now and then? It's a great way to get to know who they're hanging out with.

- For families with younger kids, everyone should stay at the table until the last person finishes eating. It's just common courtesy!

As always, I'd love to hear what works for you and your family.