

4 Strategic Tips for Planning a Family Meal

How many nights per week do you have a family dinner together at home? According to a Gallup poll, only one out of four families eat dinner together every day. It used to be the norm, but now it's a thing of the past.

Most families are busy, so much so that eating meals at home together is very difficult. Like most, our family fits into this category. One way we try to be different is by eating dinner at home daily. I'll admit that sometimes those family dinners are as simple as sandwiches and chips. But the point is, we have family dinners consistently.

Being together for meals at home is something our kids have come to depend on. It allows our kids to share what's on their minds and gives us a doorway into their lives. This month, it's the Basic Training habit we encourage you to adopt. Here are four practical ways to make this happen:

1. Create a family meal plan together. "Fail to plan, plan to fail." One of the biggest deterrents to family dinner at home is the lack of a plan. Sit down as a family and map out a basic meal plan for the week. It doesn't have to be elaborate. You may want to include a leftover night or a "breakfast night," where you can reheat leftovers or eat quick breakfast food on busy evenings. If you need some recipe ideas check out Sunday Suppers from Susan Merrill.

2. Block out a window of time that you'd like to have dinner each evening. Once you plan the meals for the week, you want to plan the ideal time you'll have them. And put it in your calendars—both personal and family. Parents and kids may have to set some boundaries to make this happen. It makes it more challenging when it's not in the calendar.

3. Choose a couple of “go-to” games or conversation starters. Make the time together fun. Take the “how was your day” conversation and turn it into “High/Low” or something else. This will make the entire family anticipate having dinner together each day as well as create some great memories.

4. Make the prep and clean up a family affair. If you want to keep it going, you must make it manageable for everyone. If one person has the planning, prep, cooking, and clean-up duties all to themselves, you can bet burnout will follow soon and family dinners will start to become a thing of the past. Assign everyone a task or tasks, no matter their age, and work together.

Huddle up with your family and plan ways to have more family dinners at home.

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