

18 questions to ask your kids at the dinner table

Sometimes, it's just plain hard to talk to your kids. It's been a long time since you've been in their shoes and the world has changed.

But as a caregiver, having meaningful discussions with your children is more important than ever. And dinner is the perfect time to cultivate those conversations.

Family dinners feed more than bellies.

According to the Wall Street Journal, eating dinner as a family reduces childhood obesity and depression.

Regular dinners together can even help children learn patience, manners and courtesy. These skills will help children into adulthood.

And family dinners can also help a family feel more connected, leading to trust. This can even build a child's confidence and make them feel loved and safe.



Making family dinners a priority can be a challenge.

Challenges get in the way of family dinners from the start.

With toddlers and preschoolers, eating as a family can be a challenge because young children don't want to sit still for long and tend to be more picky when it comes to food selection.

Serve meals family-style and ask your children to help you prepare the food. These could help them feel more engaged in the meal and make dinnertime go more smoothly.

As children get older and activities abound, family dinners tend to get pushed to the wayside.

But try making dinner times more flexible and fit them into your schedule, just as you would soccer practice or tuba lessons.

A few ideas:

- Try scheduling dinner earlier or later.
- If a child has practice, sit down together while he/she is eating.
- If it's too late for dinner, have a dessert or snack later together.
- Or try another meal together to supplement and add in extra time together (breakfast, weekend lunch, snacks, etc).

Whatever you do, make family dinners a priority from the start.

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Ask meaningful questions.

Put down those electronic devices, turn off the television, and get ready to connect as a family. And if you are having a hard time engaging your children in a conversation, here are some conversation starters that may help. The questions below are open ended-meaning they require more than a simple "yes" or "no". These are just a few ideas that should open the lines of communication for all ages, and may also help you ensure that the children feel safe and loved.

1. What was your favorite part of your day?
2. When did you feel smartest today?
3. Was there a time you felt confused or scared today?
4. What's the coolest thing you learned today?
5. How did you help someone else today?
6. Did you notice anyone getting bullied or struggling today and if so how did that make you feel? What did you do?
7. What's your favorite family tradition?
8. What's the best part of being in our family?
9. When did you do something really well today?
10. Who is your best friend at school? (Why?)
11. Who is your least favorite person in your class? (Why?)
12. What's the most interesting thing you learned today?
13. If you could travel back in time, who would you visit?
14. What's the last dream you remember?
15. If you could have any pet, what would you choose?
16. If you could have any superpower, what would it be?
17. What would be your dream job?
18. What do you think college will be like?

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Making family dinners a priority can be a struggle from the start. But it's worth the work. Connecting with your kids and asking the right questions can help you feel more engaged in their lives and even spot red flags early. Plus, making your children feel safe and loved is worth the effort.

Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 10.17.14 The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention
2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse
3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

now what? Keep Connecting.

