

Activity: The Importance of Family Meals

Facilitator's Guide



Target Audience:

- Parents of babies, toddlers, or preschoolers

Preparation

Materials Needed:

- Flip chart/easel with paper or white board
- Marker or chalk
- [Let's Talk table cards](#) Developed by Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council & Island Health. You can print the table cards from this link. You will only need one copy. You can laminate them for future use.

Handouts:

- "Looking for New Recipes and Meal Ideas?" bookmark. You will find these bookmarks at the end of the facilitator's guide. Print the page, photocopy it, and cut into bookmarks for participants.
- [Importance of Family Meals](#) . You can print this handout from this link and make copies for participants.

Background Information for Facilitator:

Eating together as a family provides many benefits to children. The benefits come from the connection to parents, the routine, and the conversations that happen at family meals. Children benefit when at least one parent sits and eats with them. It's never too early or too late to start, but starting the routine of family meals early will make it easier to keep kids coming to the table during their vulnerable teen years. Benefits include:

- increased sense of belonging and security
- greater vocabulary by school age
- better school performance
- better social and language skills

Benefits for older children and teens:

- less likely to smoke, use drugs or alcohol
- less risk of depression and suicide
- less risk of disordered eating

ACTIVITY A: Family Meals Tic Tac Toe

Tell the group (in your own words)...

It's not always easy to make time for family meals, but children that eat together with their families benefit in many ways. We're going to play a game of Tic Tac Toe that will help us discover some of these benefits.

Tic Tac Toe Instructions:

On flip chart paper, draw a Tic Tac Toe grid to make 9 squares. Facilitator reads out first Tic Tac Toe question. Parents have to agree on a True or False answer. If they get the question correct, they get to put an X on the Tic Tac Toe grid. If they are incorrect, the facilitator puts an "O" on the grid. The parents continue answering questions until they win or tie the facilitator.

Question 1: It's still considered a family meal even if only one parent sits and eats with a child.

Answer: (T) Children still benefit greatly when at least one parent sits and eats with them.

Question 2: Eating together as a family helps kids feel connected with their family.

Answer: (T) Meal time is a good time for family members to share about their day and reconnect.

Question 3: Family meals work best if you keep a few small toys on the table.

Answer: (F) Toys are distracting.

Question 4: Children that eat together with their family are more likely to have a larger vocabulary and do better in school.

Answer: (T) Opportunities to have conversations with adults expose children to new words.

Question 5: It's not worth trying to eat together as a family if you can't make it a habit every day.

Answer: (F) Any time one or two of you can sit and eat with your child is beneficial. It's time together.

Question 6: Children who eat with their parents are less likely to try risky behaviours like smoking, drinking, experimenting with drugs and developing disordered eating in their teen years.

Answer: (T)

Question 7: The best time to start family meals is around kindergarten when kids can keep up with more adult conversation and are less picky.

Answer (F) Babies and toddlers benefit from eating together with their families just like older children. It's never too early or too late to start.

Question 8: Having the TV on during family meals is beneficial because kids won't notice that they are eating a new food.

Answer: (F) Watching TV during meal time takes your child’s attention away from eating. It prevents them from being in tune with their hunger and fullness cues.

Question 9: Families that eat together generally eat better.

Answer: (T) Families that eat together tend to eat more vegetables and drink milk.

Question 10: Children that eat together with their families have better table manners than children who eat by themselves.

Answer: (T) Children who eat with a parent(s) have better table manners, likely because they have more opportunities to see adults modeling good table manners (such as passing food, asking politely, using utensils correctly, etc.).

Summary

Read out loud to parents:

Talking too much about food or focusing on how much your kids are eating can make family meals stressful and unpleasant. For ideas to stimulate discussion at the table, check out these “Let’s Talk” table cards. Providing your child with opportunities to participate in a conversation and share ideas helps with their speech and vocabulary development.

Show participants the “Let’s Talk” table cards and where they can find them to print them at home. (web link for the “Let’s Talk” cards is available to parents on the bookmark.)

ACTIVITY B: Kids in the Kitchen

Getting kids involved in the kitchen can help them feel important, and may help them be more interested in eating the meal. Cooking together usually leads to eating together.

Ask the group:

1. **What are some tasks your children can help with in the kitchen?** Have the group brainstorm these – if you like, you can write down people’s suggestions for everyone to see.
(Offer some of these examples only if the group is stuck such as: mix, stir, pour, mash potatoes, peel carrots with a peeler, toss a salad, squeeze a lemon, slice soft vegetables and fruit with a plastic knife, make bread crumbs, wipe the table, set the table, sweep the floor, “wash dishes”, unload the dishwasher, plan a meal, etc.)
2. **Does anyone want to share an example of how you have involved your child in the kitchen? What did you make? What was the experience like?**

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new recipes
and meal
ideas?

www.bettertogetherbc.ca

www.heartandstroke.com
(type "kid-friendly meals"
search in the search bar)

www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca
(look under "Food and
Nutrition" and choose
"Menu Planning")

[www.eatrightontario.ca/en/
Recipes.aspx](http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Recipes.aspx)

"Let's Talk" Cards (fun
conversation starters)
[www.bettertogetherbc
.ca/learn/resources](http://www.bettertogetherbc.ca/learn/resources)



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