



Parents Make A Difference!

Family Meals. . .

Does eating together make a difference?



How many meals do you eat together as a family each week?

Does eating together have a direct correlation on youth health, happiness and good grades? According to Weinstein's book *The Surprising Power of Family Meals: How Eating Together Makes us Smarter, Stronger, Healthier, and Happier*. "Eating ordinary, average everyday supper with your family is strongly linked to lower incidence of bad outcomes such as teenage drug and alcohol use, and to good qualities like emotional stability. It discourages both obesity and eating disorders. When families prepare meals together, kids learn real life skills. They assume responsibility, become better team members."

Finding common meal times is not always an easy thing to do, especially as youth become involved in school activities. When sitting down to a meal parents are wanting to capitalize on their time with their kids, but sometimes the way they ask questions to teens becomes a turn off to the teen, and the meal becomes more stressed than enjoyable.

How many times have you sat down to dinner and asked your teen the question, "How was your day?" and heard the familiar refrain, "Fine?" Many parents either say or think "What do you mean fine?" While their youth is thinking "Move on, I SO do not want to talk about my school day" or "here we go again."

Trying to avoid these awkward conversations can help teens and adults enjoy each other's company, have better digestion and concentrate on the important things in life, rather than the difficulties that might overshadow the day.

According to the 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) of 5,309 students in grades 7-12, from 25 schools in Southwest Wisconsin, 22.3% of students surveyed reported that they eat a meal with an adult in their home more than 10 times per week! The trend also shows that 9th grade students are more likely to eat a meal with an adult in their home than

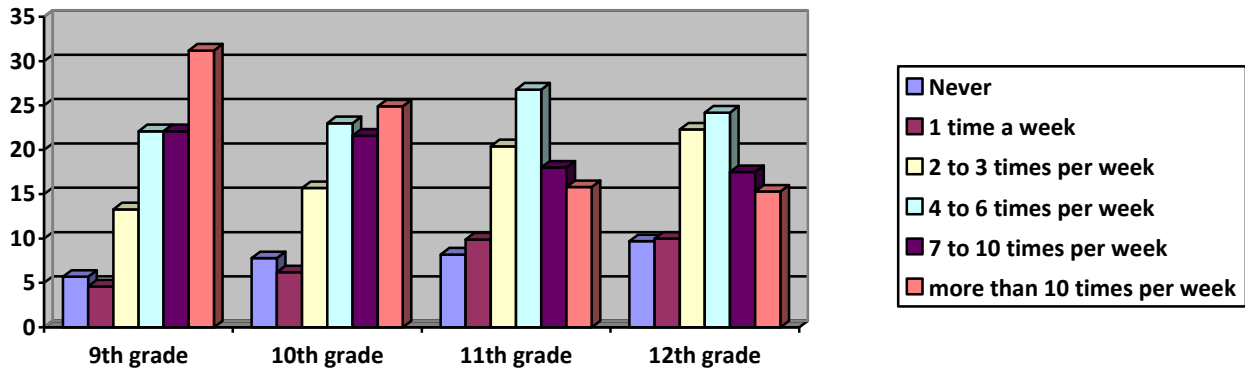
Table Talk with Teens and Preteens

Table Talk Rules:

- Agree to listen while one person speaks
- Take turns talking
- Stay away from discipline and negative topics
- Use appropriate language
- Be respectful of other people's opinions
- Be comfortable with silence
- Avoid questions with "yes" or "no" answers

a senior student (as a student gets older, their school activities typically increase, causing their home time to decrease). *See the chart below.*

About how often do you eat meals with one or more of the adults in your home?



Research shares that our children are learning about the world from many sources, often without parental filters or input. Even when everyone is home, individuals do their own thing. Perhaps the only opportunity of the day to talk with each other is at the dinner table. Children in today’s busy world need a shared, safe space to discuss ideas within the understanding company of family, and parents need a routine time to connect with kids. According to a web article on the eartheasy.com site, “mealtimes are when children learn family values and families develop their culture.”

Taking a step back in time, my fond memories of sharing dinner with my family: laughter, funny stories, plans for the weekends, chores that needed to be done, fields that needed to be tilled, fair projects that needed to be worked on, and unconditional love that came from other family members.

Find time to have a meal with your youth, share their life and be their anchor in the stormy waters of life. A quote by Josiah gives us all food for thought: “Think of your family today and every day thereafter, don’t let the busy world of today keep you from showing how much you love and appreciate your family.”

Parenting Resources:

→Weinstein, M. (2005). *The surprising power of family meals: How eating together makes us smarter, stronger, healthier, and happier.* Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press.

→Table Talk with Teens and Preteens: (<http://myparenthetical.com/>)

→ Why Eating Family Meals Together is Still Important Today: (<http://eartheasy.com/>)

→Family Quote: <http://www.thefreshquotes.com/family-quotes/>

“Parents Make a Difference” is a product of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a program of the Department of Public Instruction, University of Wisconsin-Extension and local school districts. This newsletter is adapted from the UW-Extension newsletters “Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” This issue of “Parents Make a Difference” was adapted by Lori Berget, UW-Extension Lafayette County from the resources listed above. This issue was reviewed by Bev Doll, UW-Extension Grant County; Amy Mitchell, UW-Extension Crawford County; Deb Ivey, UW-Extension Iowa County; Chelsea Wunnicke, UW-Extension Richland County; and Ruth Schriefer, UW-Extension Iowa County. Thanks are extended to the 5,309 7th to 12th graders from Southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2015 YRBS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information: Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; Crawford County (608) 326-0223; Iowa County (608) 930-9850; or Richland County (608) 647-6148. Or visit our website at: <http://www.cesa3.org/yrebs.html>

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