

OWC Faculty Parents Group: Getting the Most Out of Your Family Dinner

Have you heard about the value of family dinners, but wondered how you can make them a reality in your busy house?

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On April 6, 2015, the OWC Faculty Parents Group hosted a talk by Anne K. Fishel, PhD, Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology in the MGH department of Psychiatry. Dr. Fishel, a family therapist, has studied the benefits of family dinners and strategies to overcome obstacles to having a positive family dinner experience. Here is some information and useful tips based on her presentation:

Family dinners are good for the brain, the body and the spirit –

- Brain:** family dinners boost vocabulary in young children and are correlated with higher achievement scores and grades in older children.
- Body:** children tend to eat a bigger variety of foods at family dinners, and go on to eat healthier at older ages, and have less obesity.
- Spirit:** Evidence suggests that family dinners lead to less anxiety and depression, greater feelings of family connectedness, and lowered stress.

Obstacles to positive family dinner experiences, and some solutions –

- Picky eaters:** Encourage variety before pickiness peaks at age 4-8; model your own enjoyment of a variety of foods; use the 'rule of 15;' familiarity breeds acceptance; pair accepted foods with novel foods; as children try a food, ask them to describe it with 5 words.
- Tension at the table:** Go easy on teaching manners; keep 'button-pushing' topics away from dinner conversation; make everyone adhere to a no-technology rule; laughter and feeling listened to are the best antidotes to tension; let go of perfection
- Lack of conversation:** Tell stories (of your childhood, of overcoming obstacles a story about your name or your child's name); find conversation games that work for your family (see resource, below); play around with different roles (what would you do if you were the father?)

Dr. Fishel convinced us of the power of the family dinner to build connectedness, reduce stress and help our children develop in a positive way. For more information on her studies and ideas about family dinners see the presentation slides here:

http://www2.massgeneral.org/facultydevelopment/owc/pdf/20150406_FPGFamilyDinnersPresenterSlides.pdf

Additional resource:

<http://thefamilydinnerproject.org/>