

PREPARING MEALS@HOME

While not every family meal will be home-cooked, part of its power comes from the preparation process, including...

- **Eager Anticipation:** The time and effort invested preparing the meal create a sense of anticipation for the formal gathering. The sights, sounds, and smells of cooking launch a ritual everyone knows will culminate together around the table.
- **Memorable Aromas:** Adults remember the smells from their childhood home, more than any of the other four senses. The fragrances wafting from an oven, pan, or slow cooker create lasting, positive memories by making home a place children and teens want to be.
- **Dignifying Roles:** When we assign children a task in the process of preparing the meal, setting the table, or cleaning the dishes, we give them a sense of dignity that comes from fulfilling an important role in the central family ritual.

RULES FOR MEALS@HOME

Family meals will be more fun if you follow several simple rules...

- **Give Thanks:** Before “diving in,” the family should pause to give thanks to God as a regular reminder of our dependence upon His grace and goodness.
- **No Media:** A key goal of the Meals@Home routine is to foster good conversation. Sitting at the table facing one another provides a natural context for interaction. Turn off the television, cell phones, PDAs, iPods and all other forms of media.
- **Spill Chill:** To avoid frustration and disappointment, you should expect at least one spill during every family meal. Rather than lose your cool when your child knocks something over, use it as a reminder that we are all imperfect human beings. Don’t let the inevitable mishap spoil the entire meal.
- **Heed Manners:** The dinner table provides an ideal setting to reinforce basic manners such as how to carry on respectful conversation, looking others in the eyes when speaking to them, swallowing food before talking, saying “please” and “thank you,” and many other basic rules of civilized interaction.

Conversation During Meals@Home

Mealtime conversation should be something everyone looks forward to rather than a place to discuss problems or give correction. Sometimes good conversation requires a creative nudge. Try these simple ideas to encourage both informal chat and intentional faith conversations. **For more ideas visit www.bellevue.org/meals.**

JUST FOR FUN

Hi-Lo-Ha: An easy way to trigger conversation and learn about everyone’s day is to use this game. Each member can share:

- Hi—The best thing about their day
- Lo—The hardest or worst part of their day
- Ha—Something that made them laugh today.

For example, Mom’s “Hi” is getting to sleep in, her “Lo” may be forgetting the neighbor’s birthday, and her “Ha” was hearing her 4-year-old tell the dog jokes. You’ll be amazed at the conversations that grow out of this simple activity.

At Your Age: Invite each child to ask Mom or Dad about what their life was like at the child’s age. A seven-year-old might ask, for example, “What was your favorite TV show when you were my age?” Turning the tables, parents can ask children to describe what they think their life will be like at Mom’s or Dad’s age. Dad might ask, for example, “What kind of car will you drive when you are a dad?”

Prompt Questions: Have a list of questions on hand to prompt interesting conversation and help your family relate to one another better. Get started with these few from Mary DeMuth’s book *150 Quick Questions to Get Your Kids Talking*

- What is one thing you wish you knew how to do really well?
- If you could plan a family fun day for this Saturday, what would we do? Describe the day hour by hour.
- If you were stranded on a deserted island, what three things would you most want to have with you? Why?
- If you could live in any time period, which would you choose? Why?

Child’s Choice Night: Let a child participate in planning and creating a mealtime experience. Teach them to cook one meal they can prepare every week, or let them help plan fun menu changes such as “eat dessert first” or “eat all red foods.”

INTENTIONAL FAITH TALKS

Any Age: There are a variety of questions you can ask that will prompt faith-related discussion. Here are four examples...

- What Bible story or lesson did you learn at church this past weekend?
- Name a favorite Bible character and tell his/her story.
- If God wrote you a letter, what topic would He address and what would He say?
- God knows our future. What do you hope He sees for your future at age ____?

Older Kids: Pick an age appropriate topic to discuss from a Christian perspective. Don’t worry whether you have all the answers. The important thing is to make conversation about the truth a natural part of family life. Suggested topics include...

- Why does it really matter whether Jesus Christ literally rose from the dead? (See I Corinthians 15:3–19)
- What is Satan’s most powerful weapon against us? (See John 8:44)
- Why should we treat every human being with dignity? (See Genesis 1:27–28)

Memorize Together: Select something to memorize together as a family, spending one to two minutes per mealtime with the goal of memorizing something substantial over the summer.

Suggestions include...

- The books of the Bible in order
- The Lord’s Prayer found in Matthew 6:9–13
- The Ten Commandments listed in Exodus chapter 20 or Deuteronomy 5
- Each family members’ favorite Bible verse

Read Aloud: Select a book of the Bible to read through over the summer. If children are old enough, invite them to take turns reading aloud. A great place to start would be the Gospel of Mark or I John.

WHY MEALS@HOME?

Studies reveal that the single most decisive factor among kids who do well in school and avoid risky behaviors is eating meals with the family. As author Miriam Weinstein explains, “Sitting down to a meal together draws a line around us for a brief time and strengthens family bonds by shutting out the rest of the world as a powerful ritual against the many forces pulling us apart.” Family meals give us...

- **A place to belong:** Healthy children receive their sense of identity from church and home. At church, the communion table is the central activity uniting believers in Christ. At home, mealtime is the central event reminding each person that he or she has a place in a specific family. Both rituals yank us out of solitude and isolation and reconnect us to those with whom we have an intimate, God-ordained bond.
- **A moment of sanity:** Instead of pursuing separate activities, gathering together for family meals provides a much-needed moment of sanity. Eating together reminds us of our dependence on the Provider of all life-sustaining gifts. Hunger draws us together and to our thankfulness to God.
- **A rhythm for health:** Studies show that when families eat together they are more likely to eat balanced meals. We become vulnerable to destructive patterns when we disconnect ourselves from God-ordained rhythms. Eating alone or on the fly increases the likelihood of overindulgence and junk food. Conversation during family meals, by contrast, helps us plan and pace our eating while creating a regular occasion for connection.

Overcoming Obstacles

Patterns of modern life can make family meals the exception rather than the norm. Some of us can't imagine a Meals@Home routine due to dual-income schedules, extensive business travel, or children involved in a variety of extracurricular activities. Establishing and protecting the family table will require making difficult, counter-culture choices. We can't passively adopt unhealthy cultural norms and “hope for the best.” If a daily routine is impossible, take baby steps by establishing a pattern of at least three family meals per week.

GOING FURTHER

ONLINE RESOURCES:

www.bellevue.org/meals—Conversation Starters, Table Talks, and other ideas to help you build faith around the family table. Check it out!

www.bellevue.org/homepoint—Practical resources and the step-by-step guidance you need to nurture faith at home, tailored to fit your unique needs.

www.bellevue.org/familyfaithplan—Real-life strategies to help parents pass their Christian faith on to their children.

CONNECT WITH OTHER FAMILIES:

Regardless of your family design, life is better when you're living it out with other people. Call us at (901) 347-5740 or visit www.bellevue.org/lifegroups. We'll help you find a Life Group that is perfect for you.

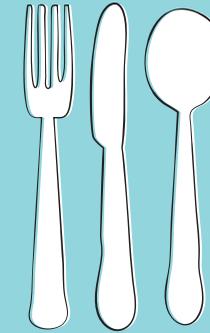
RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

The Surprising Power of Family Meals by Miriam Weinstein is filled with insights and practical ideas for making mealtime special. Eating together makes us smarter, stronger, healthier, and happier.

The Table Experience by Devi Titus helps you enhance your own table experience. Invite the Lord to your table where memory-making moments with family and friends are created.

150 Quick Questions to Get your Kids Talking by Mary DeMuth helps prompt fun, meaningful conversation.

Dinner Table Devotions by Nancy Guthrie provides short faith reflections designed for use around the dinner table.



MEALS @HOME

REVITALIZE YOUR FAMILY TABLE



www.bellevue.org/meals

