

How Family Dinners Can Make Your Family Happier and Healthier

ANNE K. FISHEL, PHD

DIRECTOR, FAMILY AND COUPLES THERAPY PROGRAM, MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL

ASSOCIATE CLINICAL PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY, HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

AUTHOR, *HOME FOR DINNER: MIXING FOOD, FUN, AND CONVERSATION FOR A HAPPIER FAMILY AND HEALTHIER KIDS*

CO-FOUNDER, THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT



THE
**FAMILY
DINNER**
PROJECT.ORG



Food, fun and conversation
about things that matter

FAMILY DINNERS MAKE YOU HAPPIER, HEALTHIER AND SMARTER

- ✓ BETTER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
- ✓ HIGHER SELF-ESTEEM
- ✓ LOWER RISK OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE
- ✓ LOWER RISK OF TEEN PREGNANCY
- ✓ LOWER RISK OF DEPRESSION
- ✓ LOWER RATES OF OBESITY



COGNITIVE BENEFITS

1. DINNER CONVERSATION BOOSTS VOCABULARY
2. HIGHER GRADES IN SCHOOL
3. HIGHER ACHIEVEMENT TEST SCORES



NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS

1. INCREASED CONSUMPTION OF FRUITS, VEGGIES, PROTEIN, FIBER, AND VITAMINS
2. DECREASED CONSUMPTION OF FRIED AND FATTY FOODS AND SODA
3. LOWER RATES OF OBESITY AND EATING DISORDERS



MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

LOWER RATES OF:

- ✓ VIOLENCE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE
- ✓ SCHOOL PROBLEMS
- ✓ EARLY SEXUAL BEHAVIOR TEENS
- ✓ ANXIETY, DEPRESSION AND STRESS

HIGHER RATES OF:

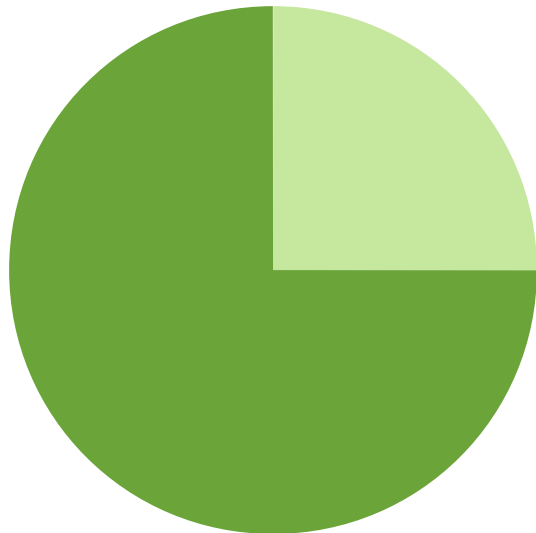
- ✓ RESILIENCE
- ✓ SELF ESTEEM

WHAT IS FAMILY DINNER?

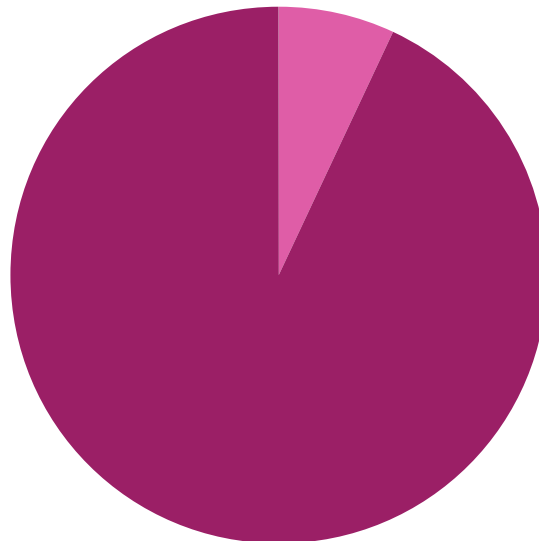
- ANY TWO PEOPLE, NOT EVERYONE NEEDED
- CAN INCLUDE SHORT CUTS, TAKE-OUT, NOT SCRATCH FOOD, ORGANIC, NOR GOURMET
- BEST NOT TO HAVE TV ON BUT SOME GADGETS ARE OK SOME OF THE TIME
- TALKING BETTER THAN SILENCE
- DON'T BE CONSTRAINED BY "5 TIMES A WEEK" RESEARCH FINDINGS
- IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT!

FAMILIES WANT TO HAVE DINNER

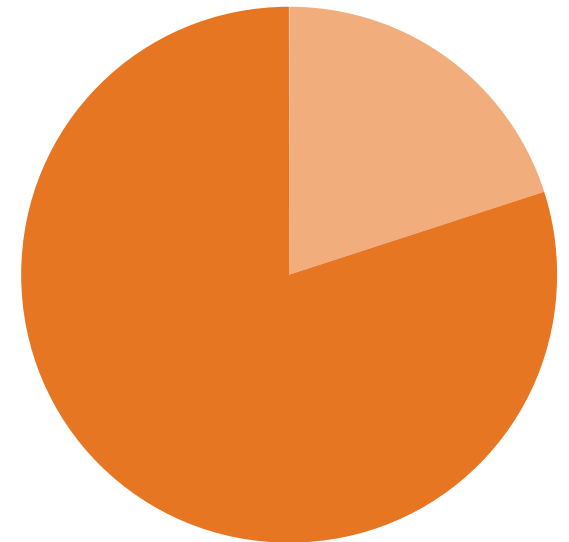
75% of Americans who eat dinner with their family less than 5 times per week want to **increase the frequency of their family meals**



93% of adults say sharing meals is the **best way to connect with their family**



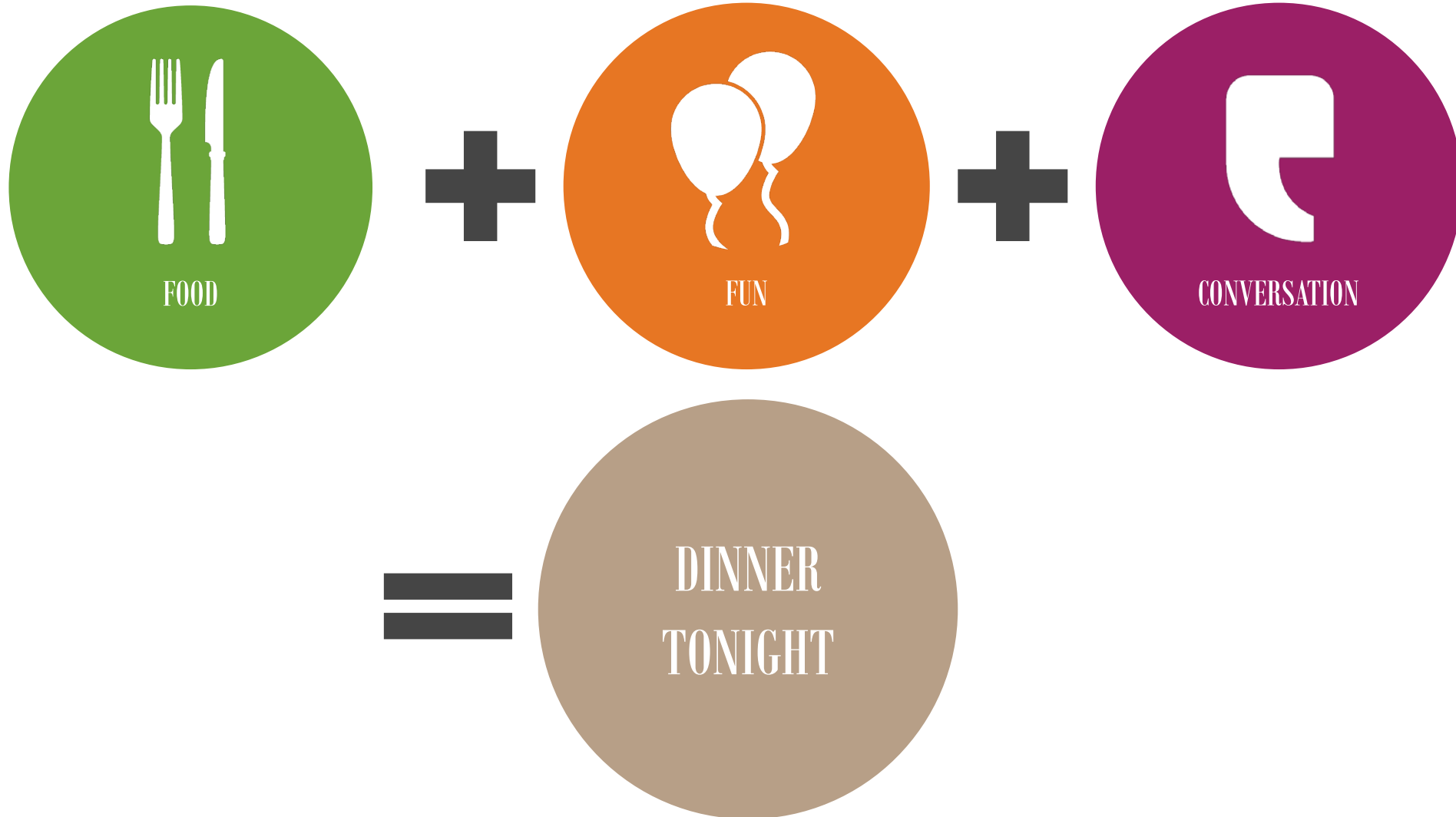
80% of teens would rather **have dinner with their parents**





What do we do?

FIGURE OUT WHAT'S FOR DINNER TONIGHT



DINNER TONIGHT



DINNER TONIGHT
 Chef Nate's
 Sausage Fusilli



FUN
 One person leaves the table. The others choose an emotion. When Person #1 returns, the family acts out the emotion and Person #1 tries to guess what they're feeling.



CONVERSATION
 Have you ever seen someone treated unfairly because of what they looked like or where they came from? How did it make you feel? How do you think it made them feel?



DINNER TONIGHT
 November 19, 2015

Pasta Poulet

INGREDIENTS
 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breast, cubed in 1/2-inch pieces
 1/2 cup olive oil
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 4 cloves garlic, minced
 4 mushrooms, sliced
 4 scallions, sliced white and green
 1/2 cup chicken broth
 1/2 cup vermicelli
 1/2 cup thick pepper
 1/2 cup hot sauce, or other tangy pasta sauce

CONVERSATION
 You were invited to a party, but you were the only one who didn't go.

FUN
 You bring an emotion, and the rest of the family acts out the emotion. When you return, they try to guess what you're feeling.

DINNER TONIGHT
 November 10, 2015

Chicken Noodle Lettuce Wraps

INGREDIENTS
 1 head Romaine lettuce
 2 tablespoons coconut oil
 1 1/2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken (you can use breasts or thighs), cut into 1-inch cubes
 1-inch cubes
 4 cloves garlic, minced
 1/4 cup soy sauce or tamari, preferably low sodium
 2 tablespoons honey
 4 oz. brown rice noodles (not ram) 1 cup shredded carrots

CONVERSATION
 You believe in love at first sight.

FUN
 One person gives a category, like "Things at the zoo." Other players try to name 3 things that belong to that category.

DINNER TONIGHT
 November 17, 2015

Pork Schnitzel

INGREDIENTS
 4 boneless pork chops
 1 cup whole wheat breadcrumbs
 1 tsp. garlic powder
 3/4 tsp. salt
 1/2 tsp. paprika
 1/2 tsp. black pepper
 2 eggs, beaten
 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
 Lemon wedges, for serving

CONVERSATION
 If you could cast a new family member, what would it be?

FUN
 The leader thinks of a person everyone knows. Others ask questions like "If she were a vegetable, which would she be?" until they can guess!

INSTRUCTIONS
 1. Preheat your oven to 375 degrees.
 2. Combine the bread crumbs, paprika, garlic powder, salt, and pepper in a large, shallow dish. Set aside.
 3. Place each pork chop inside a zip-top bag or between two sheets of plastic wrap. Pound the pork chops with a mallet until they are about 1/4 inch thick.
 4. Dip each pork chop into the beaten egg, making sure to coat evenly. Transfer to the breadcrumb mixture and coat thoroughly.
 5. Melt 2 tablespoons of the butter in a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Add two of the coated pork chops, making sure not to crowd the pan. Cook the pork chops for 4-6 minutes, turning once, until golden brown on both sides. Transfer the pork chops to a baking sheet and repeat with the remaining butter and pork.
 6. Bake the pork chops at 375 degrees for 15 minutes, until lightly crisp and cooked through. Serve with lemon wedges.

GET MONTHLY TIPS

STARTING A FAMILY DINNER ROUTINE FOR BACK TO SCHOOL



Food

Summer's not over, even if vacation is! Sweeten your family dinner with the Earl family's Rice Cream Pie!



Fun

Get back in "school mode" with some literature-themed family dinner ideas from Dr. Anne Fishel!



Conversation

Celebrate Esther Day – or any day – with conversation starters about the power of love!



CELEBRATING THE SEASON WITH FAMILY DINNER



Food

Team member Bri shares a family holiday recipe: A Swedish dessert "soup" that's good on ice cream, yogurt or just on its own!



Fun

'Tis the season for gift-giving!



Conversation

This month, brainstorm ways to give to others by asking "What's one thing that could make _____ happier today?"



INDEPENDENCE AT THE DINNER TABLE



Food

Enjoy summer's bounty with Brenda Thompson's fast and fresh Bruschetta Chicken Skillet!



Fun

It's the perfect season for some outdoor family time. Relax during (or after) dinner with a game of "Use Your Senses."



Conversation

Tackle the topic of independence and dive into American history with these Recipes for Conversation!



CONVERSATION STARTERS



CONVERSATION STARTER

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would you want to live?



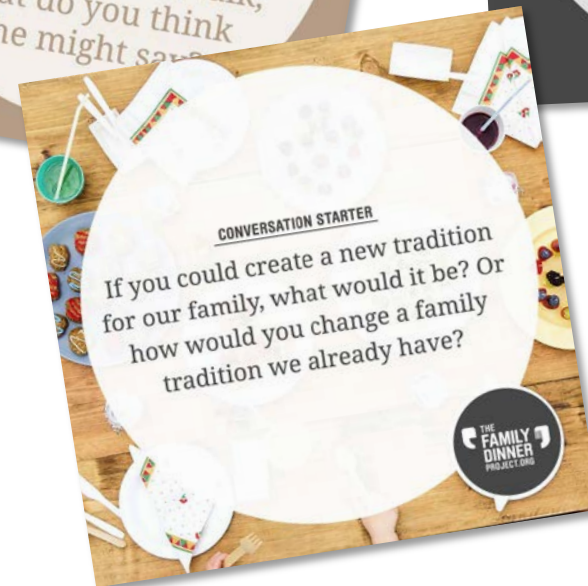
CONVERSATION STARTER

If your pet could talk, what do you think s/he might say?




CONVERSATION STARTER

If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would you eat?



CONVERSATION STARTER

If you could create a new tradition for our family, what would it be? Or how would you change a family tradition we already have?



CONVERSATION STARTER

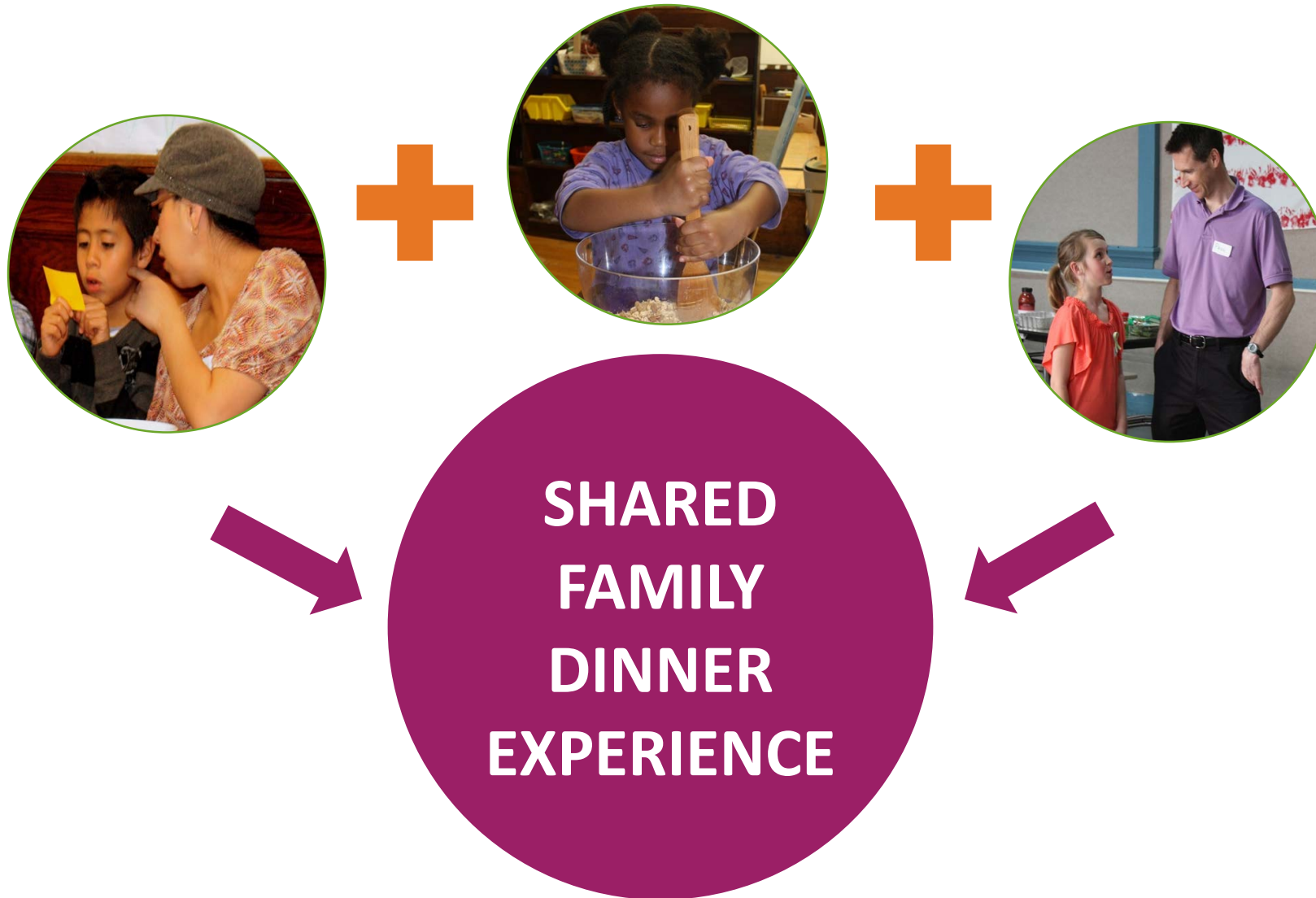
What's one fun thing you hope to do in the next year?





Community-based events

COMMUNITY DINNERS





COMMUNITY DINNERS

- COOK TOGETHER– GUACAMOLE, SALAD AND LASAGNA
- PLAY GAMES: ROSE, THORN, AND BUD
- KIDS INTERVIEW PARENTS ABOUT CHILDHOOD DINNERS
- KIDS GO OFF TO MAKE DESSERT AND PLAY GAMES
- PARENTS SHARE STRENGTHS, OBSTACLES, AND SOLUTIONS

COMMON OBSTACLES

- LIKE PEDIATRICIANS ASK ABOUT SEAT BELTS AND HELMETS
- DO YOU HAVE FAMILY DINNER? HOW OFTEN?
- IF NOT, WHY NOT? THE BIG 4:
 1. LACK OF TIME
 2. PICKY EATERS
 3. TOO MUCH TENSION AT THE TABLE
 4. TEENS DON'T WANT TO

NOT ENOUGH TIME

- MAKE DOUBLE BATCHES
- DINNER SWAP
- COOK “QUICK FOOD” LIKE BREAKFAST OR LUNCH FOODS
- CONSIDER MAKING BREAKFAST OR A LATE-NIGHT SNACK AN INTENTIONAL MEAL
- MOST RELIABLE TIME TO CONNECT
- PUSH BACK ON CULTURE OF BUSYNESS
- ONLY TAKES 22 MINUTES

PICKY EATERS

- PARENTS DECIDE WHAT, WHERE, & WHEN; KIDS DECIDE HOW MUCH
- GET TODDLERS TO TRY FOODS
- MODEL **YOUR** ENJOYMENT
- PLAY WITH FOOD
- INVOLVE KIDS AND MAKE THEM STAKEHOLDERS
- CUT DOWN ON SNACKING
- RULE OF 15: FAMILIARITY BREEDS ACCEPTANCE
- DON'T PROMISE A BENEFIT FROM EATING A VEGETABLE
- DESSERT IS NOT A REWARD
- ONE BASIC MEAL THAT CAN BE CUSTOMIZED

REDUCING TENSION AT THE TABLE

- PREPARE A LIST OF MEALS THAT EVERYONE WILL AGREE ON
- GO EASY ON TEACHING MANNERS
- AVOID TOPICS THAT USUALLY RESULT IN FIGHTS (E.G., GRADES OR MESSY ROOMS)
- LIMIT TECHNOLOGY AT THE TABLE
- PARENTS AND KIDS ADHERE TO SAME TECHNOLOGY RULES
- LAUGHTER AND FEELING LISTENED TO ARE BEST ANTIDOTES
- PLAY GAMES AND TELL STORIES

TEENAGERS DO WANT TO EAT WITH YOU

- 60% OF TEENS EAT WITH PARENTS 5 OR MORE NIGHTS A WEEK
- 80% OF TEENS WOULD RATHER HAVE DINNER WITH PARENTS
- DINNER IS RATED HIGH ON LIST OF ACTIVITIES FOR TEENS
- DINNER TIME WHEN MOST LIKELY TO TALK WITH PARENTS
- TEENS HAVE MOST TO GAIN IN TERMS OF LOWERING HIGH RISK BEHAVIORS

THANK YOU!

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE
CONTACT
THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT:

[CONTACT@THEFAMILYDINNERPROJE
CT.ORG](mailto:CONTACT@THEFAMILYDINNERPROJE
CT.ORG)