

# THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT



## Champion Handbook



# Welcome Letter

Dear Champion of The Family Dinner Project,

Welcome to The Family Dinner Project! We are delighted to share our program with you and your community.

Thanks to you, growing numbers of families are gathering around food, having fun and engaging in conversation while reaping the benefits of family dinner.

This workbook is intended to provide you with helpful resources and ideas, and to offer inspiration and support as you embark upon this exciting work.

As we pass along our program to you, we hope the following three points will be at the center of your work:



## Family Dinner Is Important

- Research shows that frequent family dinners promote health and well-being. For example, increased family dinners help to improve kids' vocabulary, resilience and self-esteem, while decreasing their likelihood of eating disorders, teen pregnancy and substance abuse.
- Contained in this Toolkit is a “menu” of family dinner data for you to become familiar with and share at your events.



## There are Resources Available to Make Dinners Happen

- The Family Dinner Project website contains many useful resources on food, fun and conversation about things that matter, as well as tips for overcoming obstacles.
- All families have both struggles and solutions to share. We can learn from our communities.



## You Can Do It (and it can be Fun!)

- There's no such thing as a “perfect” family dinner.
- Families come together for food, but the fun and conversation keep them coming back.
- Family dinners can happen at the table, at the counter, on a picnic blanket, in a restaurant or at breakfast. We meet families of all types where they are. Wherever you are, remember that food, fun and conversation are all it takes to make a family dinner.

Thank you again for being an invaluable part of The Family Dinner Project community.

Happy Food, Fun and Conversation,

*The Family Dinner Project Team*





# Introductory Activity

## BEFORE WE DIVE IN...

What memories or thoughts does “family dinner” bring to you? Jot down a few notes in the space below...

Imagine or remember a successful family meal. What made it successful? What were some of the challenges you faced to getting everyone together for a meal?

Handwriting practice area with a dotted border and five horizontal lines.

Handwriting practice area with a dotted border and five horizontal lines.

## LET’S HAVE SOME FUN:

Sketch a poster or billboard advertising “tonight’s dinner” to your family. How will you sell tonight’s dinner to your family? What should they look forward to? It can be playful!

Large dotted rectangular box for drawing a poster or billboard.

Play and fun is an important part of TFDP philosophy!







# Why We Believe Family Dinner Matters



## REFLECTION

Write a one-word statement that begins “At family dinner, I want to feel...”

At family dinner, I want to feel...

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## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY DINNERS?

**AGES  
1-5**



Conversation at the dinner table is even better than reading to children in boosting their vocabulary, and helping them to read.

Kids who start eating dinners now are less likely to be overweight later.

New parents who develop a dinnertime ritual feel more satisfied with marriages.

**AGES  
6-12**



Strong link between family dinners and academic performance, even stronger than doing homework, sports, or art.

Increased intake of fruits, vegetables and micronutrients, and fewer fried foods, trans fats and sodas.

Children feel more connected to siblings and parents.

**AGES  
13-18**



Teens who eat regular family dinners are more likely to get A's in school.

Reduces high risk teenage behaviors like smoking, substance abuse, eating disorders, teenage pregnancy and violence.

Reduces depression and anxiety and increases self-esteem.

Opportunity to check in with kids to find out how they're doing.

**Check out pages 36-37 for more research and information**



## AT THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT, WE BELIEVE...

- ...that fun and conversation are every bit as important as food
- ...that families come in all shapes and sizes
- ...that dinners don't need to be perfect to be effective (and they don't need to be dinner!)
- ...that dinners get better when all family members participate
- ...that healthy food matters, but we're not the food police

## OUR MISSION

- The Family Dinner Project is a growing movement that champions family dinner as an opportunity for family members to connect with each other through food, fun and conversation about things that matter.
- Informed by existing research, we help families learn how to unlock the benefits of family dinner.
- We build community-based programs and online resources to help families make dinner simpler, more nutritious, more fun and more meaningful.
- Building on strengths, we support families in overcoming the obstacles to having regular family dinners.





## WHAT WE DO

Our approach is designed to create authentic and meaningful engagement and bonding. TFDP carries out our work through the following programs—all of which are available free of charge:

### Community-based programs:

#### Community Dinners

TFDP works with schools, community-based organizations and neighborhoods to facilitate Community Dinners, which are a powerful way to create a community of support for families who want to change their dinner habits.

#### Parent Groups

These groups provide opportunities for parents to speak about dinner challenges and to share mealtime resources and wisdom while building community with other parents.



### Online resources:

#### Food, Fun and Conversation: 4 Weeks to Better Family Dinners

This comprehensive online program helps families make shared meals a household staple in just four weeks. Participating families receive free healthy and easy recipes, suggested dinner activities and conversation starters, as well as regular email reminders to help keep them on track for success.

#### Dinner Tonight

This resource provides participants with daily dinner inspiration and exclusive membership features, free of charge. Members get an email every weekday with a recipe, conversation starter and game, plus the ability to save favorites in a personal account. Members can also create and edit shopping lists, keep track of dinnertime progress and more.

#### Monthly Newsletter

Our monthly newsletter includes easy and healthy recipes, strategies for defusing family tension and suggestions for transforming dinner table conversation into fun opportunities to learn and grow.



## Envisioning impact

We think that if we empower, connect and support families, then they will have more frequent and better family meals.

### What do you believe family dinners will do for your community?

Sometimes it's helpful to think about this as an "if... then" statement. For example, "if I host a successful community dinner event, then families in my community will be more likely to eat dinner together more frequently."

### Give it a try:

If...

Then... families will have better and more frequent family meals

Look carefully at the first half of your statement, the "if." What needs to happen to get to that point? What resources do you need to make it happen?

What do you need to make your "if" feasible?

## OUR IMPACT SO FAR

### Total Number of People Served

#### Total number of people served (since 2011)



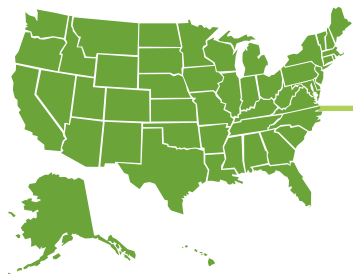
#### Number of places we've worked/where organizations are using our materials:

##### 5 COUNTRIES



United States	Philippines
Canada	Russia
United Kingdom	Australia
Poland	

##### 16 STATES



Arizona	Missouri	Washington	Tennessee
New York	Kansas	Montana	Georgia
Massachusetts	Florida	Illinois	Ohio
California	D.C.	Indiana	Michigan

#### Current number of partners:



**15 ACTIVE PARTNERS**  
ESTIMATE OF TOTAL PARTNERSHIPS: OVER 60

As a Family Dinner Project Champion, you are essential to our mission and vision. You are a vital part of this movement to inspire more families to gather around food, fun and conversation!



## Championing Family Dinner



### CHAMPIONS ARE ESSENTIAL TO FURTHERING OUR MISSION

Champions like you are **essential** to bringing to life The Family Dinner Project's mission and vision. We believe that our mission can help families everywhere, but we understand that you know best how to present our resources to your community, in ways that are collaborative and respectful.



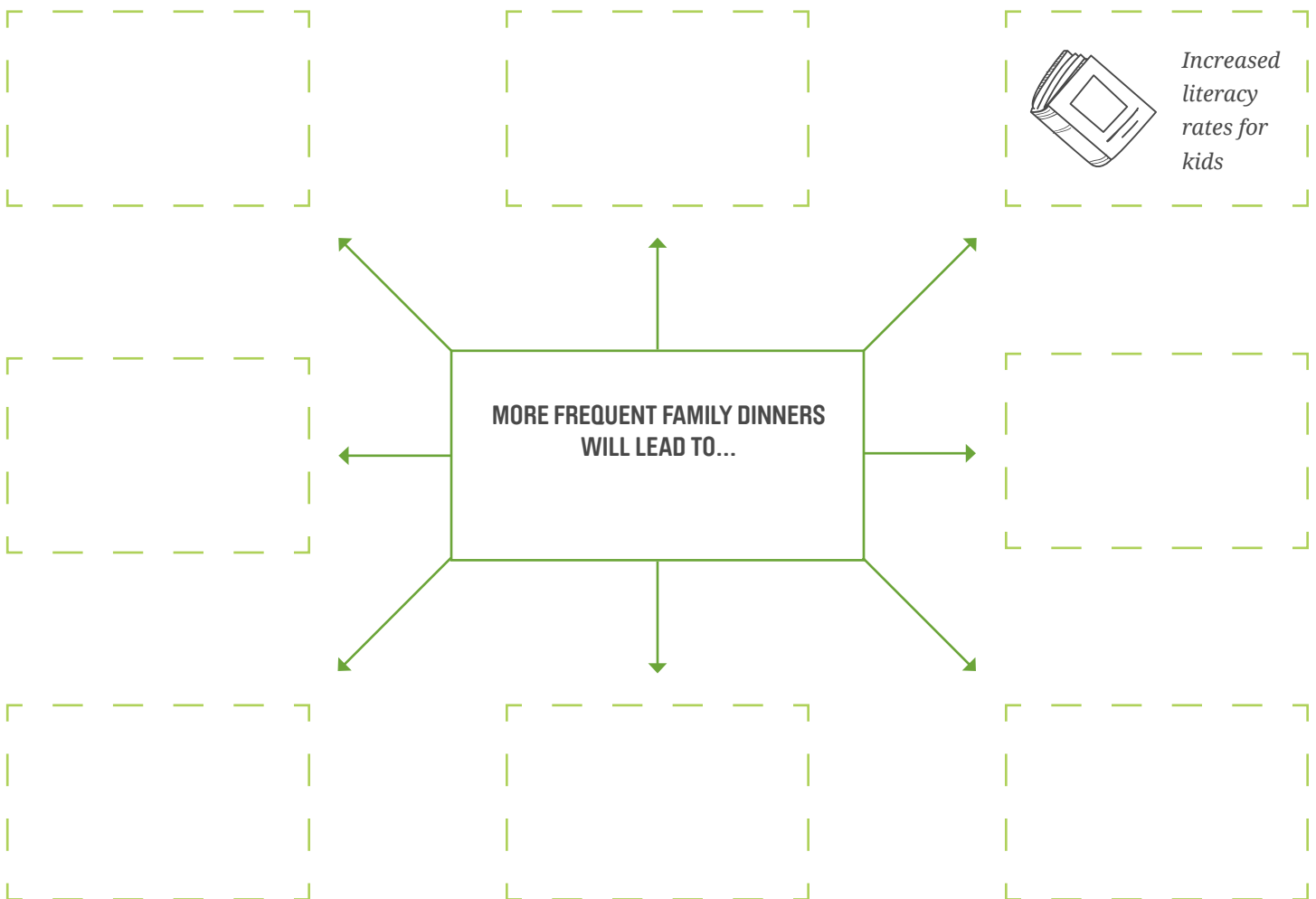


## REFLECTION

Think about the “ripple effect” of family dinners. We know from research that family dinners lead to many positive outcomes in children and teens.

In this activity, think about your community and your goals as a Family Dinner Champion. As you reflect, use symbols to represent the positive outcomes you imagine will occur, as families in your community gather for more frequent dinners together.

For example, we drew a book - as we know that more frequent family dinners help to increase rates of literacy among children. What symbols will you add to the web? What do you hope for your community?



## RESOURCES FOR CHAMPIONS

### Online:

- Dinner Tonight
- Food, Fun and Conversation: 4 weeks to better family dinners
- Monthly Newsletter
- Specific resources on food, fun and conversation

### Useful Documents

- **Community Dinner Guide:** This comprehensive workbook covers the “how-to’s” of hosting a Community Dinner, from planning, to recipe selection, tips and tricks, etc.
- **Bytes and Bites Community Media Dinner Handbook:** Designed in partnership with Common Sense Media, this guide covers topics to consider when planning a dinner where “technology use” is the main focus.
- **Facilitator’s Manual** - This document contains simple and essential information for the folks leading a Community Dinner.
- **Four Week Program** - This is our “curriculum” for families who need more specific help jump-starting their family meals. This program includes recipes, planning resources and activity ideas to support families as they embark upon a month of family dinners.
- **On the Table Family Guide** - This is a guide for families to support them as they embark upon more serious conversations at the table, about topics such as community building, diversity and stereotypes.



If you believe members of your community would benefit from our specialized resources for low-income families, please check out Dinner Tonight: Budget Friendly.

### What Do You Need from us?

We want to learn from you, to make our program stronger and even more broadly applicable. Please don't hesitate to make suggestions, offer feedback and request whatever you need.

Email: [contact@thefamilydinnerproject.org](mailto:contact@thefamilydinnerproject.org)



# Bringing The Family Dinner Project to Your Community



As a Champion, we know that you deeply understand the elements of your community that make your home unique - the people, politics, history, demographics that make your community dynamic and different.

## REFLECTION

Imagine that you could host a dinner party where representatives from your community could gather around food, fun and conversation. Who would be at the table? Think about the community members who are very active and who have a strong presence in the community. Think also about the people who might not be as visible, but who still make a difference.

Community members might include local leaders, business owners, educators, tradesmen in a local industry, public servants, etc. We often refer to these people as **stakeholders**.





## Finding Support to Bring your Community Together

At The Family Dinner Project, we believe in collaboration and knowledge sharing. As you think about partnering and connecting with community members, the more people “at the table,” the better.

As you consider the groups or individuals who might support you in this work, it is important to consider the ways in which this group reflects and represents you, your work and The Family Dinner Project.

Use the chart below to place the community members at “seats” around a table, by writing their names at each of the circles.

In the middle of the table, jot a few notes answering the following prompts:

### In my community...

- Who is most likely to come to the table?
- Who should be invited to the table?
- Who might not come to the table? Why?
- What cultural considerations do I need to be mindful of?
- Who could support outreach efforts?

**MY COMMUNITY:**



## Champion Spotlight: April's Kitchen Counter in Charleston, West Virginia



April's Kitchen Counter  
REAL. GOOD. FOOD.



April Hamilton is a passionate chef, parent and Family Dinner Project Champion. She models how to build community in her own network and beyond.

April knew that because Family Dinner is an meaningful concept with such wide-ranging benefits, that her work would resonate with a variety of groups and organizations in Charleston, West Virginia. Starting with her children's schools and the local YMCA, April began networking with parents, teachers and members of her existing network. After receiving positive feedback, suggestions and introductions to others, she was able to expand her reach. She connected with representatives from local universities, sourced donations from grocers and restaurants and co-marketed her events with public health non-profit organizations and the local newspaper. April considered each of the audiences that she connected with and framed her pitch about TFDP's mission and benefits, accordingly.

April considered the different groups whose work and missions would complement The Family Dinner Project's values and mission. She started with people in her own network and then expanded to a broader playing field. She was organized in her communications, and followed up with the different organizations in a respectful and timely way.

April reminds us that it's important to start with the groups and organizations where you have connections and existing partnerships. The "ripple effect" of building community networks takes time.







## TAILORING THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT TO YOUR COMMUNITY



When thinking about how to further The Family Project's mission in your community, a good starting point is to think about the specific programs and resources that might be the most relevant, appropriate and beneficial.

Take a moment to think about the challenges or barriers that your community experiences, that might prevent families from engaging in frequent family dinners. What are the challenges that members of your community face, when it comes to planning or executing a Family Dinner? How do you know that these challenges exist?

### A PROBLEM/CHALLENGE I SEE:

Ex: community members don't have time to fit dinners into their schedules



### HOW DO I KNOW THAT THIS IS A PROBLEM? WHERE HAVE I SEEN, HEARD, OR LEARNED ABOUT THIS CHALLENGE?

Ex: many of the parents I know have mentioned to me that because of their family's schedules, fitting in time to stop and sit down together is hard.

## OUR APPROACH

At The Family Dinner Project, we meet families where they are, and we tell families to forget the idea that dinner has to be “perfect.”

We hear about several common obstacles in our work with families, including time, money, cooking skills and tension at the table. As you read some of these challenges, listed below, consider which of these might resonate in your own community. **How might you respond to a participant who expressed their frustration with one of these challenges?**

### Several of these challenges might include:

Parents worry about doing it “right”



- At a Community Dinner Event, facilitators emphasize that it doesn't have to be perfect! We prepare a simple meal together, and model how to be relaxed and low-key when something spills, a child acts out and things don't go as planned.

Picky eaters make it difficult to plan meals



- Our website contains a whole index of Build Your Own recipes to help everyone get involved and please pickier palates. Involving your kids empowers them with a sense of ownership and can inspire them to try something they created.
- The best strategy to prevent picky eating is for parents to model their own enjoyment of foods they are offering their kids at the dinner table. Serving food “family style” in bowls or platters placed on the table allows children to see the adults enjoying a food that the kids can just reach out and try.
- Another common mistake is for parents to give up too easily if a child refuses a new food. Researchers have found that children may need up to 15 offerings of new foods before they decide they like the food.

Cooking or planning family meals is overwhelming



- Our Dinner Tonight program makes planning family meals doable. Parents are provided with everything they need, from a recipe to a shopping list, to plan for dinner.

### Tension at the table when families dine together



- With guidance from co-founder Dr. Anne Fishel, our website contains many resources for conflict resolution at the table.
- Some families argue about particular topics, like messy rooms or a recent science grade. Agreeing to avoid those topics during dinner will decrease fighting during mealtime. Other families just seem to argue as a way of communicating with one another. In such a case, you may want to set certain ground rules

### Family members don't follow the rules or use table manners



- Our website contains many resources for addressing tension at the table, but our co-founder Dr. Anne Fishel recommends “going easy on teaching manners at the table”. Focusing on those manners that help build respectful speaking and listening, like not speaking with your mouth full or not talking over anyone, are a good place to start. Those manners are ones that parents can also try to improve themselves, which will make kids feel less scrutinized.

### Family schedules don't allow for family dinner



- Parent groups explore how “dinner” can be a snack or meal, at any time of day, where families connect. Parents share and discuss the different times of the day and week when they gather for a quick family meal, such as before school.

### Lack of financial resources to afford cooking meals at home



- Newsletters and website contain resources for recipes that contain affordable ingredients.

### Limited cooking skills make it difficult to add variety



- Our website has recipes and resources to support all skill levels.

Our goal is to think optimistically about addressing these barriers and empower families by sharing ideas to support their own goals. We've learned a lot from families over the years, and we support and encourage families by sharing tips and tricks we've learned. On the following pages, we've included a small overview of the vast wisdom families have shared with us over the years.

## 1. TRY TO MAKE THE COMMITMENT



The most important thing in our busy world is to make the intentional choice to have dinner together. Some tips:

**A. Schedule it:** Like you schedule the other appointments in your life, put dinner in your calendar. Instead of Skyping to dinner, go home to dinner and Skype back to work.

**B. Be flexible and easy on yourself:** If you have a soccer game, bring a picnic. If schedules don't match, stretch dinner out: veggies and dip while cooking, dinner with one parent, and dessert with the other parent after work.

**C. Keep other meals in mind:** If dinner isn't possible, do family breakfast or a late night snack.



## 2. MAKE IT SIMPLE



The last thing you want is more stress.

**A. Pre-make meals:** Cook a big batch of soup or a double batch of a casserole over the weekend, and freeze it to make weekday dinners easier.

**B. Choose meals that are fast to assemble:** Meals can be thrown together quickly with help from store-bought ingredients, like pre-cut veggies or pre-made pizza dough.

**C. Have everyone pitch in:** Getting everyone involved makes dinner easier, faster and more fun. Encourage kid participation with simple dishes (pizza, burgers, tacos, or even a pot of chicken rice soup, which kids can add their favorite toppings to, like chopped carrots or peppers, roasted garlic or sliced cheese). Dishes with bright colors also encourage participation.

*Letting kids play a role in buying and cooking food makes it more likely that they'll try new foods, especially vegetables. Your kids will want to try the new food(s) because they've been part of the process and now they're invested in it.*

### 3. MAKE IT FUN



The more fun the meal, the more likely everyone will want to come back to the table.

**A. Create meals based on favorite books, like Green Eggs and Ham or quidditch stew from Harry Potter.**

**B. Have indoor picnics.**

**C. Let your teens pick the music.**

**D. Let kids choose the ingredients**

**E. Engage kids in great conversation, which is always fun.**

**F. Play games at the table, like Two Truths and a Tall Tale, and have everyone else at the table guess which is which.**

**G. Play with your food: Have kids arrange salad into a face on a plate, or make shapes out of pizza dough.**

## REFLECTION

How might you use The Family Dinner Project resources to address the specific challenges or concerns that you anticipate in your community?

By hosting a **Community Dinner** event

*Challenges this event might help address in my community:*

By hosting a **Parent Group** workshop

*Challenges this event might help address in my community:*

By organizing a group of community members to use the **4 Weeks to Better Family Dinners Program**

*Challenges this event might help address in my community:*

By encouraging community members to use the **Dinner Tonight** programs

*Challenges this event might help address in my community:*





## Making The Family Dinner Project Yours



### FIRST: MAKE IT YOURS, HAVE FUN!

Champion April Hamilton was a passionate chef, but expertise in the kitchen is not necessary to becoming a Champion. Talent for connecting with people, facilitating a conversation and event planning are also equally important. So, while we provide many resources, frameworks and models to support your work, we encourage you to approach your role as a Champion in ways that reflect your own passions and individual strengths.





## How might you incorporate your own passions, skills, interests or style into your work as a Champion?

Take a few moments to respond to the following prompts:

I think my biggest strengths are...

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Some of my strengths that serve my community might be...

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I love to contribute to my community by...

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I like to express my creativity through...

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I am really passionate about...

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## JUST FOR FUN: MAKE YOUR CENTERPIECE



If you were going to have a centerpiece for your event that captured the themes or ideas of your responses to the questions on the previous page, what might it include? What objects might be used, to “represent” your unique attributes and skills at your family dinner event?

### For example:

“I like to express my creativity through... doing crafts with my children”

... You might include construction paper flowers, play dough shapes, or crayons in your centerpiece.

*Not super crafty? That’s okay! Think about what elements could go into a centerpiece for your event and write a description of the piece. You could also make a list of what you would need to put it together.*

DESIGN YOUR CENTERPIECE HERE:

## CHAMPION CASE STUDY: MADISON YMCA – MAKING COMMUNITY DINNERS “THEIRS”



As an active partner with The Family Dinner Project for three years, the Madison YMCA has beautifully modeled how to merge The Family Dinner Project’s resources and structures with their own unique focus and approach.

The Madison YMCA hosts several Community Dinners each year, and part of their process has been creating a unique “brand” to define and market their event. The menus, activities and conversations at their events are aligned with the night’s theme - talk about fun!

During the Community Dinners, as certain issues or concerns have arisen among parents, such as finding time to cook - the YMCA organizers respond to those specific concerns by creating additional parent workshop series where those target issues were addressed.

As the YMCA is a center for physical fitness and recreation, organizers incorporate an “active” portion of the night, featuring games and movement activities for kids. While food, fun and conversation is still at the heart of their events, their dinners truly feel like a YMCA event.

What has been key to the success of their events? Program Manager, Erin Rowell says, “TEAM WORK! It takes many hands to help an event run smoothly. We also have wonderful community partners that help us with food donations and help with the presentation portion when needed. We ask our families what they are struggling with or would like to learn about. This is a great way to get ideas about what is needed. The last thing anyone wants to do is sit and listen to people talk about topics they already know about. Being engaged and in tune with our members is the best way to know how to set the theme of our events.”

From designing their own marketing materials to theme-specific table cards, the Madison YMCA leveraged their own strengths and skills, while staying focused on The Family Dinner Project’s core goals: food, fun and conversation.



## REFLECTION

What are some aspects of the Madison YMCA's program that resonate with you? How might you incorporate your work, focus or passions into your events?

Jot a few notes here:

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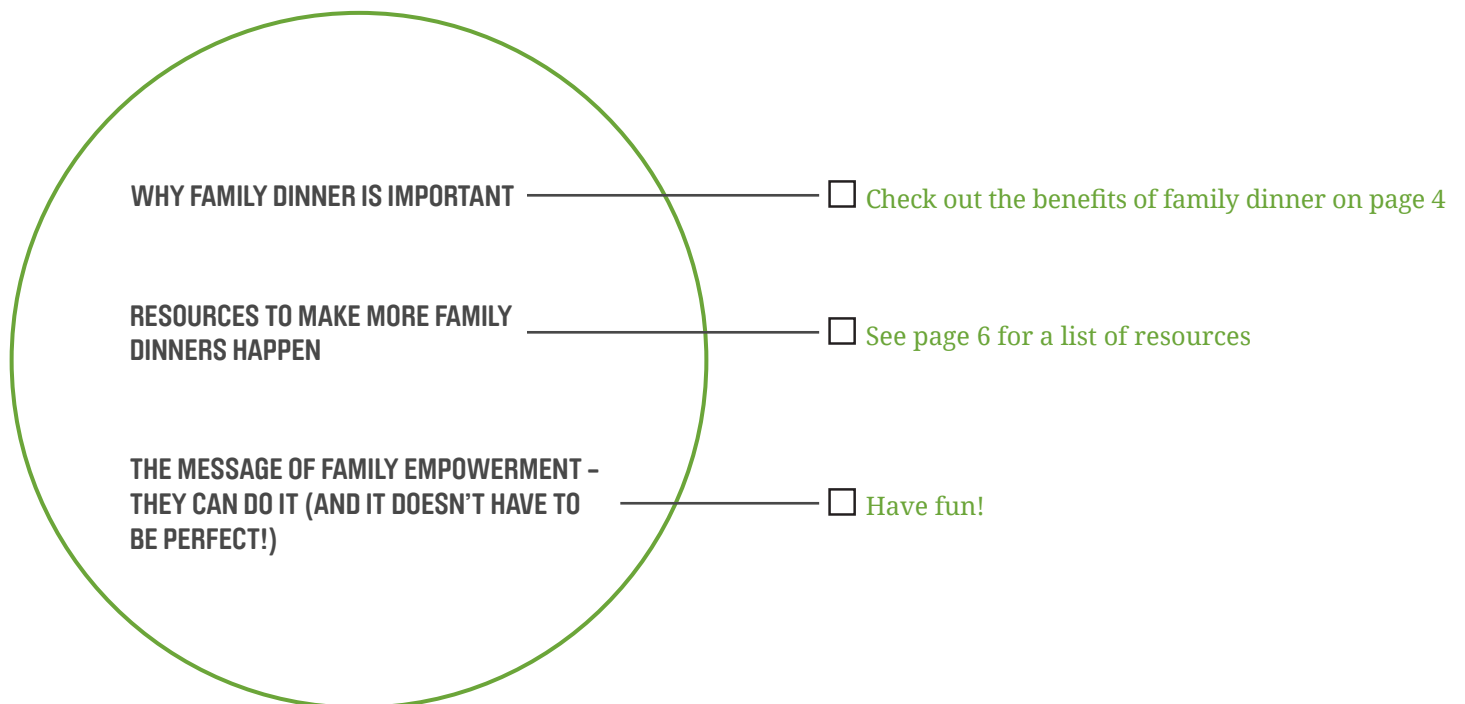


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## AS YOU MAKE IT YOURS, WHAT REMAINS AT THE CENTER

As you think about the ways that your event represents you, and aligns with your community, it is important to keep the following at the center of your events, dialogue and activities:

### Keep these at the Center



## REFLECTION (BASED ON WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED SO FAR)

What are some aspects of the Madison YMCA's program that resonate with you? How might you incorporate your work, focus or passions into your events?

### Note:

Remember to be mindful of challenges that different families face, and of the different circumstances that exist in our communities. Of course, no two families are alike, what works for one family might not work for another. How might the advice you give facilitate knowledge sharing and creative problem solving?

Advice about Food:

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Advice about Having Fun:

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Advice about Conversation:

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# Program Evaluation and Sharing Feedback



## HOW'D IT GO?

Author Anne Lamott writes about three words that help us to reflect more deeply on our experiences: **help**, **thanks** and **wow**. This framing is a useful one for Family Dinner event reflection - especially for those of us who tend to be harder on ourselves!

Try to find space for yourself to consider the following:

### Help

What was an area or component that could be reconsidered next time? What did you learn, and how might you shift your planning/organizing to reflect that learning, next time? Again, The Family Dinner Project is here to support you, learn from you and provide whatever resources may be useful to you and your community. Don't be afraid to ask for help!

### Thanks

What are you thankful for? What did you enjoy, appreciate or find fun? Who were the people who supported you and how might you express gratitude to them? What aspects of your own skills were highlighted?

### Wow

What were you surprised by? What was "awesome" about your event?





The Family Dinner Projects asks that Champions share with us (via email) the following pieces of information, after each of your events:

- A copy of your event sign-in sheet - We will collect and organize the contact information of attendees, and add them to our mailing list.
- Event notes - Feedback, details about the event and lessons learned.
- And, a bonus for us: pictures and anecdotes! Please share with us any photos, stories, comments overheard or wonderings. Again, we would love to see you in action!

**Note:**

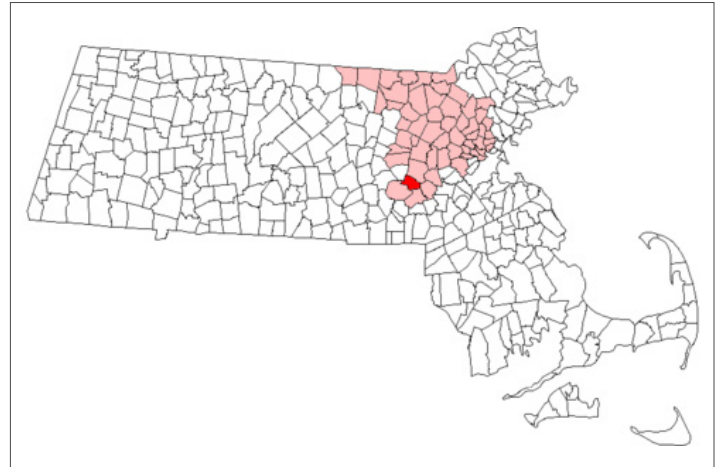
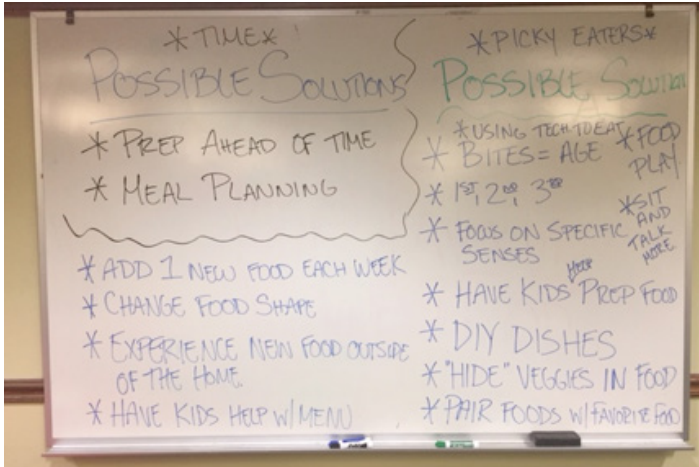
Do let us know if you are interested in helping The Family Dinner Project with deeper program evaluation in your community!

After reflecting upon each event, it is helpful to consider how to sustain engagement.

**Remember, building engagement takes time!**  
Starting small is just fine.



## CHAMPION SPOTLIGHTS: BUILDING COMMUNITY IN ASHLAND, MA



Family Dinner Project Champion Betsy is a wonderful model of how “slow and steady wins the race!” She has worked diligently and patiently for several years, and has expanded her impact. Over time, she has facilitated the development of a local coalition that strives to work with Ashland’s lower income populations. Now, she hosts several events a year, and the gatherings draw a mix of repeat attendees and new participants. This work takes time, but the potential impact of this work is worth the wait!

Betsy started with a small parent workshop, and over time, she expanded her network. In 2017, Betsy hosted her first Community Dinner Series. The Community Dinners in Ashland are co-hosted by several different organizations: a coalition created by Betsy (Ashland Decisions at Every Turn), Ashland Public Schools and Ashland Public Library.



### KHERA'S STORY

We first met Khera through our work with the Mayo Clinic. She attended an event we co-hosted and was hooked. She started small, by hosting a dinner in her living room. Check out her story, here. Over time, she connected with influential community members and with organizations that she knew would be enthusiastic about The Family Dinner Project mission: schools, the local library and city council members. Slowly, but steadily, she broadened her reach.

## REFLECTION – GOAL SETTING

Think about the two Champions whose stories you just learned more about. As you reflect upon your future work as a Champion, think about several goals for your first 6 months, first year and first two years, as a Family Dinner Champion. Your goals can be personal - ways that you want to grow and be challenged. Your goals can also reflect hopes for your work, such as a number of events you'd like to help organize, or the number of organizations you hope to partner with, etc.

Remember, it's perfectly OK - and actually, ideal - to start small and grow!

Try to set goals that are specific, measurable, achievable within the timeframe (be gentle on yourself here) and realistic.

In my first **6 months** as a Family Dinner Champion, I hope to...

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In my first **year** as a Family Dinner Champion, I hope to...

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In my first **two years** as a Family Dinner Champion, I hope to...

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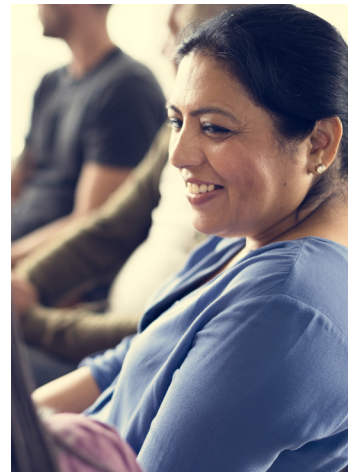


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# Becoming Part of The Family Dinner Project Community

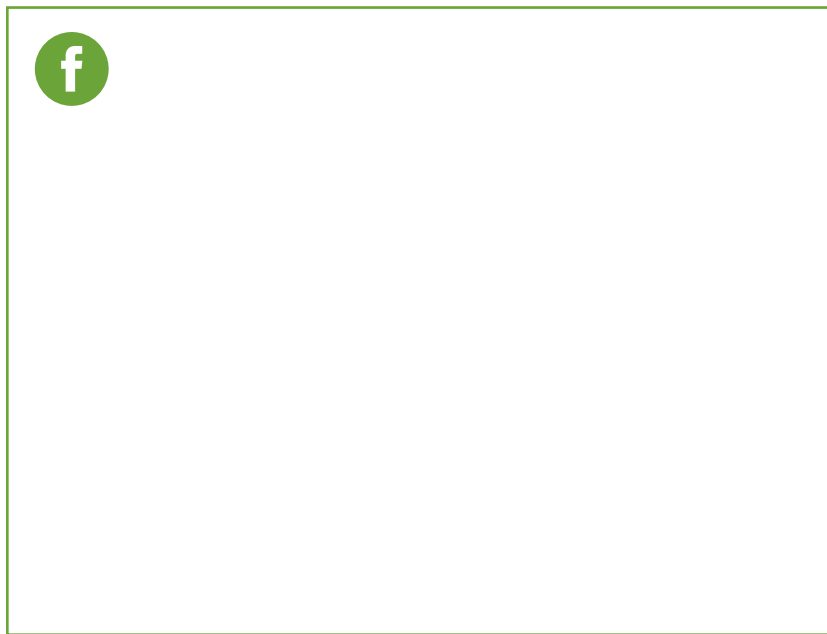


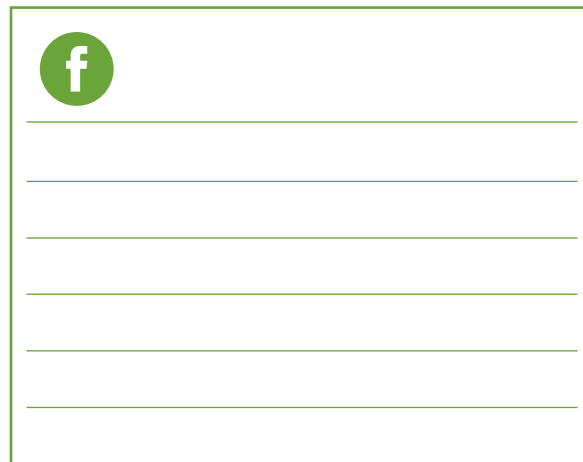


## ACTIVITY: SOCIAL MEDIA

### POST IT ON FACEBOOK:

Sketch an image of a “post” you might make on Facebook, to spread the word about TFDP, an event you’ve organized or your own passion for family dinner. Write a caption for your post, too. Hashtags like #fdpchamps(insert state initials) are encouraged (and don’t forget to tag @TheFamilyDinnerProject)!


 A large rectangular box representing a Facebook post. In the top-left corner, there is a circular icon with a white lowercase 'f' on a green background. The rest of the box is empty, intended for a user to draw a picture and write a caption.


 A smaller rectangular box representing a Facebook post. In the top-left corner, there is a circular icon with a white lowercase 'f' on a green background. Below the icon are five horizontal lines for writing a caption.

*For examples of sample Facebook posts, refer to page 42 in Appendix II.*

### TWEET IT!

If you were going to tweet a “one liner” to promote The Family Dinner Project, what would you write? Be sure to tag us (@FDP\_tweets) and use any hashtags you like!

Remember, you’re limited to 140 characters!


 A large rectangular box representing a Twitter post. In the top-left corner, there is a circular icon with a white lowercase 't' on a green background. Below the icon are five horizontal lines for writing a tweet.

*For examples of sample Twitter posts, refer to page 42 in Appendix II.*

## OUR MESSAGING

**As “ambassadors” of TFDP, we’d like to encourage you to remember the following when communicating with your communities:**

- The Family Dinner Project is guided by food, fun and conversation about things that matter. With all of our communications, we try to be warm and friendly without being sugary or sentimental. We want to acknowledge the challenges of family dinner while offering helpful, concrete solutions.
- When communicating with our community members, we try to strike a balance between funny and earnest, simple and adventurous. Family dinner tips are intriguing but doable, such as lighting candles during a Tuesday dinner or cooking a dish from a child’s favorite book.
- When appropriate, we try to incorporate research and statistics about the benefits of family dinner.

**We try to avoid the following:**

- We try not to use the terms “values” and “family values”, as these phrases have become politicized.
- We try to avoid tones that position us as “experts” telling families what they “should” do. Even though we do indeed have some experts on our team, we are dedicated to empowering families by emphasizing that they’re their own experts. And we always let folks know that many of our great tips come from creative, real families.



**Spreading the Word about Your Events:**

We have a wonderful Toolkit to help you plan the marketing and outreach for your events. You can find that Toolkit on page 41 (Appendix II).

**Keep us Posted!**

Please share with us any images, anecdotes, words of wisdom, ideas...We can’t wait to hear from you!

**We welcome you into our community, and are very grateful for your support!**



# Appendix I: Family Dinner Research

## WHY FAMILY DINNER?

What if there was one change you could make to improve your kids' vocabulary, resilience and self-esteem, while decreasing their likelihood of eating disorders, teen pregnancy and substance abuse? What if just one change could boost their physical, social-emotional and academic development?

### PHYSICAL BENEFITS



- Greater consumption of vital nutrients from fruits and vegetables and less soda consumption.
- Lower rates of obesity.
- Lower caloric intake, associated with home cooking as compared to restaurant equivalents.
- Better cardiovascular health in teenagers.
- Reduction of asthma symptoms.
- Greater likelihood of eating healthier diets when they're on their own as young adults.
- Greater likelihood of not being obese as young adults.

### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BENEFITS



- Higher self-esteem, resilience and a more positive outlook on the future.
- Lower rates of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, behavioral problems in school, and depression.
- Better able to bounce back from cyberbullying
- Better body image.
- Having 5 or more family meals per week lowered girls' risk of developing an eating disorder by 30%.
- A survey of almost 5,000 ethnically diverse adolescents found that teens who had regular family dinner had less disordered eating, particularly related to dieting and binge eating.





## ACADEMIC BENEFITS



- Better grades.
- A Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) study found that adolescents who ate dinner with their families (3 to 5 times per week) were twice as likely to get As in school compared to classmates who rarely ate dinner with family.
- Ability to have complex conversations.
- Conversation at table is greater vocabulary enhancer in preschoolers than reading aloud to them.
- Higher reading scores in school-aged children.

But in spite of all these benefits, many families are not eating together:



- 90% of parents say that family dinners are important for the health and welfare of their kids.
- 20% of meals are eaten in the car.
- From 1999 to 2010, the percentage of low income youth eating dinner together 5 or more times a week decreased from 47% to 39%. Among higher income families there was an increase from 56% to 61% during that same decade. In general, about 50% of American families are having regular family dinners.
- An average of 70% of meals are eaten out of the home.
- 69% of Americans report that some other activity is competing with the typical family dinner, particularly watching television and 58% of Americans report some type of technology or entertainment-related distraction.



## Interested in learning more about the benefits of family dinner?

### Check out these resources:

What if there was one change you could make to improve your kids' vocabulary, resilience and self-esteem, while decreasing their likelihood of eating disorders, teen pregnancy and substance abuse? What if just one change could boost their physical, social-emotional and academic development?

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## Appendix II: Publicity Toolkit

### You've decided to host a TFDP event. Now it's time to spread the word!

This brief toolkit is designed to help you publicize your event. We've included a suggested timeline as well as some samples of materials that you can use for PR and social media purposes. Feel free to add your own posts and ideas to the suggestions we've provided; every community is different, and only you know what will work best for your audience.

Because The Family Dinner Project is a growing movement, we ask that you help us keep our social media presence consistent and clear by following the guidelines we've provided whenever you post about your events and related activities on your social media accounts. If you have any ideas or questions about the guidelines, please share them with us. We love to hear from our partners and always enjoy getting your feedback!

### CONTENTS

- Sample Timelines
- Sharing Do's and Don'ts
- Sample Press Release
- Sample Reminder Email
- Homemade Whipped Cream
- Social Media Graphics for General Use
- Contact Information



# Sample Timeline

## 4–6 weeks before your event:

- Send out the Press Release to your local media outlets.
- Contact any local newspapers, TV stations or websites that offer events calendars to the local community, and ask to have your community dinner listed.
- If you haven't already done so, consider inviting local dignitaries such as the mayor, a state legislator, or other influential person who may be connected to your organization or your mission.

## 3 weeks before your event:

- Share the news of your event on your social media channels. We recommend the following posts:

**TWITTER:** Excited to host a @FDP\_Tweets Community Dinner on (date)! Do you know why #familydinner is good for kids? <http://thefamilydinnerproject.org/?p=9109>

**FACEBOOK:** (Share the “How Kids Benefit from Family Dinner” graphic) These are just a few reasons why regular family dinners are important. Find out more and enjoy food, fun and conversation about things that matter at our upcoming Community Dinner with @TheFamilyDinnerProject! (Date, Time, Location, RSVP information)

- Send a photo of your choice to The Family Dinner Project via email with the subject header “We Support Family Dinner.” The photo should represent your organization in some way; a picture of your staff, your building, some of your community members or whatever is meaningful to you. We'll be sharing the photo on social media, so please be sure that you have the permission of all people photographed to share the image publicly. Bonus points for making your photo fun!
- Remind people where and how they can sign up to attend your Community Dinner. A sample “Reminder email” is included in this kit. You can also use social media to help you spread the word. We recommend these posts:

**TWITTER:** Our @FDP\_Tweets Community Dinner is coming up on (date)! Don't forget to sign up to join in the food, fun & conversation! (Include a link, email, or phone number for registration.)

**FACEBOOK:** (Share a conversation starter graphic) Don't forget to sign up for our upcoming Community Dinner, presented in partnership with @TheFamilyDinnerProject! We'll be sharing in great conversations like this one,, so don't miss out. The dinner will be held on (date) at (time). Register now! (Provide a link, phone number, or email).

## 2 weeks before your event:

- Schedule at least three social media posts about your Community Dinner this week. We've provided several graphics you can share on any social media channel to help you communicate the benefits of shared meals. Choose the ones that seem most relevant to you and your community and share as many as you like! Don't forget to include a message with each post that reminds people of your upcoming event.
- If your press release or event listing has been posted anywhere, be sure to share it with your audience and thank the person or organization who posted it.
- Start planning for "live" sharing from your Community Dinner. Contact us to ask about setting up a hashtag!

## 1 week before your event:

- Decide who you'd like to have "live" sharing details from your event on social media. For many community dinners, choosing only one or two staff members from your organization will feel like the right choice. For some larger dinners or dinners that will include many local dignitaries or guests of honor, sharing the hashtag with others can be a good way to spread the word. You might consider sharing the hashtag with the staff of any special guests and asking if they'd mind using it in the event they talk about your dinner on their social media channels.

*One thing to keep in mind is that while "live" sharing is a great way to boost the visibility of your event while it's happening, you don't want families participating in the event to be glued to their electronic devices, tweeting and Facebooking instead of focusing on one another! For that reason, we recommend that you not share your hashtag with the general public.*

- Just as you did last week, schedule at least three social media posts about your Community Dinner. Again, you can choose from the graphics we've provided, and encourage people to make time to join you for your event.
- Continue sharing any other publicity that's been given to your event, and thanking those who have made it possible.

## On the day of the event:

- Post one final graphic on all your social media channels. We suggest including a reminder, such as:  

**"Tonight's the night! Join us for our Community Dinner, presented in partnership with The Family Dinner Project. Doors open at (time)!"**
- Begin "live" sharing. We suggest following these live sharing guidelines:

**DO:**

- Use your custom hashtag at the end of every message you send. Doing so will help to create a good record of your event and will make it easier for others to follow along.
- Tag The Family Dinner Project whenever possible. If our team members are present at your event, they'll also be live sharing and tagging you!
- Share photos if you're able. Images are the most powerful social media posts!
- Share before, during, and after the event. Good "shares" usually come from:
  - Setup  
*For example, "Setting the tables for tonight's Community Dinner! The room looks great. #fdpchamps(insert state initials)"*
  - Food prep  
*"So much shredded cheese! Tonight's tacos are going to be awesome. #fdpchamps(insert state initials)"*
  - Family arrivals  
*"Can't believe how fast this place fills up! Great turnout. #fdpchamps(insert state initials)"*
  - Facilitator remarks  
*"Lynn of The Family Dinner Project: Family dinners boost kids' vocabularies more than reading to them! #fdpchamps(insert state initials)"*
  - Family reactions  
*"Making the whipped cream was so fun!" 6yr old Community Dinner participant #fdpchamps(insert state initials)"*
  - Aftermath  
*("How did we get guacamole on the wall!?! Must have been a fun night! :D #fdpchamps(insert state initials)")*

**DON'T:**

- Use names or identifying characteristics of people who attend your event. The only exception would be a local dignitary or guest of honor who has consented ahead of time, or team members (your own or The Family Dinner Project's) who are present at the event.
- Share photos of people unless you've gotten their consent to share their image on social media.
- Share negatives. For example, "Lots of empty seats tonight" would be a negative share, whereas "Still some spaces available if you want to join us for tonight's dinner!" is a positive way of letting people know you have room for more guests.



## Within 2–3 days after the event:

- Post a follow-up thanking participants for coming and (if possible) letting everyone know when the next event will be held. We recommend something like this:

TWITTER: Great time was had by all at our @FDP\_Tweets Community Dinner! Join us next time, 10/31 at 7:30 p.m. #FDPPartnerDinner

FACEBOOK: What a wonderful time we had at our Community Dinner! Thanks to all who joined us and @TheFamilyDinnerProject for the event. Our favorite moment was dessert! Be a part of the next Community Dinner on (date) at (time). #FDPPartnerDinner

- Get in touch with us to talk about a follow-up post for the TFDP Blog!
- Relax and pat yourselves on the back. Job well done!



# Sample Press Release

Your Name and Contact Information

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: DATE

(Name of Your Organization) Invites the Community to Dinner

(Your Location): (Name of Your Organization) is pleased to announce that it will be hosting a Community Dinner in partnership with The Family Dinner Project on (date) at (time). The free event is open to the public and will be held at (location). Families of all shapes, sizes and ages are invited to join in an evening of food, fun and conversation about things that matter.

(Your organization) decided to partner with The Family Dinner Project, a growing movement headquartered in Cambridge, MA, because (Insert quote from one of your staff members here!). The staff decided to bring the program to the community to help families overcome common challenges to regular family dinners, such as (what's the number one reason you think your community members might struggle with dinner?). The upcoming Community Dinner, which is the first in a three-part series, is designed to bring families together under the guidance of trained facilitators, who will lead the dinner guests in activities such as making easy appetizers and desserts to contribute to the meal, as well as provide ideas and support for improving conversations around the table. All families in attendance will also have the opportunity to join The Family Dinner Project's free program, "Four Weeks to Better Family Dinners," which can be completed independently in their own homes and contains recipes, activities and expert guidance to help improve the quantity and quality of shared family meals.

The Family Dinner Project website notes that "Researchers have confirmed what parents have known for a long time: sharing a family meal is good for the spirit, the brain and the health of all family members." Some of the benefits include higher grade point averages, improved body image and healthier eating habits among children who regularly eat dinner with their families. (Your organization) hopes to bring these benefits, and many others, to the families they serve. (Insert another great quote from your staff, if you'd like!)

For more information about the Community Dinner, please contact (insert the appropriate information here) or register (provide a link or other information for registration). To learn more about the benefits of family dinners and to explore tips, resources and recipes for your own family, visit [thefamilydinnerproject.org](http://thefamilydinnerproject.org).

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# Sample Reminder Email

Just a reminder....

Our Community Dinner event, presented in partnership with The Family Dinner Project, is scheduled for (date) at (time)! We hope you'll be able to join us at (location) for a fantastic evening of food, fun and conversation about things that matter. If you haven't already registered for this free event, please take a moment to do so by (provide the method of registration here).

If you have questions, feel free to contact (name) at (contact information)! Also, we encourage you to check out The Family Dinner Project to learn more about their mission and explore the resources they have to offer. Visit them at [www.thefamilydinnerproject.org](http://www.thefamilydinnerproject.org).

# Homemade Whipped Cream



## Whipped Cream Activity



### Set-up

- Several small (tightly-lidded -- screw caps are best!) plastic containers OR plastic/metal shakers with agitator balls (or marbles) -- about one for every 2-3 kids
- Bag of confectioner's sugar
- Plastic spoons
- Bottle of vanilla extract
- Pints of heavy whipping cream -- 1 pint per every 8-10 guests should be plenty

### Recipe/Activity Directions

1. Pour whipping cream into each container or shaker.
2. Add a few spoonfuls of sugar and a small splash of vanilla.
3. Carefully screw the lids on -- make sure they're tight!
4. Turn on music, if available.
5. Have the kids jump, dance and shake their containers as hard as they can! It may take several songs -- and sometimes adult help -- but shaking and dancing really can produce some great whipped cream!

# Social Media Shareable Graphics

## CONVERSATION STARTERS:





## RECIPES FOR CONVERSATION:



### RECIPE FOR CONVERSATION

Talk About: Shared Meals



*Use these conversation starters around your dinner table*

If you could learn to cook anything, what would it be?

Are there certain foods we eat that bring up memories for you? Share.

Besides the food, what are some things about eating with family or friends that you enjoy?

If you could invite any person from history to dinner, who would it be? What would you serve? What questions would you want to ask them?



### RECIPE FOR CONVERSATION

Talk About: The Power of Love



*Use these conversation starters around your dinner table*

How does it affect you when someone shows their love for you?

How does it make you feel to show someone else that you love them?

Is it easier to say "I love you" to some people, and harder to say it to others? Why?

Have you ever had to do something difficult in order to show your love for someone?

What's one thing you can do today to spread love in the world? How about this week? This month?



# BENEFITS OF FAMILY DINNER GRAPHIC



AGES  
1-5



Conversation at the dinner table is even better than reading to children in boosting their vocabulary, and helping them to read.

Kids who start eating dinners now are less likely to be overweight later.

New parents who develop a dinnertime ritual feel more satisfied with marriages.



AGES  
6-12



Strong link between family dinners and academic performance, even stronger than doing homework, sports, or art.

Increased intake of fruits, vegetables and micronutrients, and fewer fried foods, trans fats and sodas.

Children feel more connected to siblings and parents.



AGES  
13-18



Teens who eat regular family dinners are more likely to get A's in school.

Reduces high risk teenage behaviors like smoking, substance abuse, eating disorders, teenage pregnancy and violence.

Reduces depression and anxiety and increases self-esteem.

Opportunity to check in with kids to find out how they're doing.

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# CONTACT US

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