

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

After dinner the children will go to a separate area. Your role as the Facilitator is to facilitate a discussion and provide an opportunity for families to talk about challenges and solutions to having family dinners- to benefit from one another's real-life experience. Your job is to set the stage: invite the sharing of what is working well, followed by challenges, and then solutions. Draw people out when they have something to say and try to get everyone involved and contributing. We suggest using a large whiteboard or easel with paper to document their responses throughout the discussion.

While the following paragraphs outline the role of the Facilitator during the dedicated discussion time after dinner, it is important that the Facilitator, along with the Event Planner and rest of the volunteer team, engage with the families from the beginning of the event. Engaging in conversation and connecting with the families is important for building trust and rapport and key to making the facilitated discussion portion of the evening successful.

Parent Discussion Outline

1. Why family dinner is important to me
2. A bit of research
3. What is working well for their family dinners
4. Gathering challenges
5. Good ideas to overcome challenges
6. Ideas from Family Dinner Project
7. Food, Fun and Conversation

Note: This facilitated discussion is adapted from The Family Dinner Project's parent workshop, which lasts an hour to an hour and a half, so it is only a taste of what could be a much longer discussion. It will seem short and will feel like you have just begun the conversation, but that is okay.

“What this means to me” (the presenter):

Begin by sharing how you got started with family dinners and how that has affected your life or why it interests you.

- What really inspired you?
- What keeps you invested?
- Why do you think it’s so important for families to commit to sharing dinners together?

What is working well:

During this part of the discussion you are trying to get a sense of what is working well for families for their family dinners and encourage them to share as part of the group discussion. Allowing the families to start with the positive will make it easier to have them participate and share their challenges as well. It is important for them to recognize the things they are getting right in order to help address some of their challenges. Document their comments on a whiteboard or easel-sized pad of paper.

Challenges:

This is an opportunity to compile real life challenges, and help parents see that they are not alone in their struggles.

Facilitator Question:

“So between the research (see resources for examples) and our own personal motivations, we have a lot of good reasons to make family dinners happen more often. But as we all know, there are lots of things that can get in the way. What gets in the way of family dinner at your house? What do you find most challenges your ability to get to the table together?”

Process: Ask for comments from the group. Make a list on a blackboard, whiteboard, or easel-sized pad of paper.

Possible Sparks:

- I can’t get my two-year- old to sit at the table with us.
- My kids fight when they are together for more than five minutes.
- Our schedules are too full; we can never find the time.
- I never have the time to get dinner together.
- I hate cooking!
- My kids refuse to eat the same food I want to eat.

Solutions- Parents as Experts:

For every challenge a family in your community faces, chances are another family in that community has faced and overcome something similar. Gather good ideas from people that will help with one or two challenges. You might share some ideas from other parents you have worked with or from the FDP website.

Facilitator Question:

“We have resources within this group to build a list of ideas to deal most challenges we have named. We don’t always know the resources are sitting next to us. By sharing our ideas, we begin to see the abundance that is all around us in our community, a resource we can continue to utilize long after this dinner ends. So let’s look at the challenges on the list and if you have run into a challenge and found a successful way of dealing with it, share the idea and let’s gather as many good ideas as we can in the next 15 minutes.”

Ideas from FDP:

Take a look at the FAQ portion of our toolkit. Check out our website and the Food, Fun and Conversation Program for tips from The Family Dinner Project team on overcoming all sorts of challenges to family dinner.

Closing Comments:

After dessert, before everyone leaves for the night, remind them of Family Dinner Project resources.

- Briefly review, and give families a copy of Food, Fun and Conversation: 4 Weeks to Better Family Dinner