



THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT Your Guide to Hosting a Community Dinner



 THE
FAMILY
DINNER
PROJECT.ORG

*Complete Guide
Including Tips & Tools*

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THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT

Your Guide to Hosting a Community Dinner



WELCOME!

On behalf of The Family Dinner Project, welcome! We're delighted that you're interested in hosting Community Dinners, which are fun events that provide a structured model to help families recognize the many benefits of family dinners, learn how to put best practices into action and brainstorm together about overcoming common challenges. Hosting a Community Dinner is doable, worthwhile and most importantly, it's fun! Intrigued? Read on!



ABOUT THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT

The Family Dinner Project (TFDP) is a non-profit organization leading a growing movement of food, fun and conversation about things that matter. Decades of research tell us why family dinner is important. TFDP shows families how to connect with each other to have more, and better, dinners. Through online resources and community-based programs, we help all families access *the benefits of shared meals*.

Hosting a Community Dinner



Looking for a fun way to help families in your community have healthier, more meaningful meals? Organizing a Community Dinner can help you do just that! As part of this guide, you'll find tips and materials for both hosting and facilitating a successful event.

We get it. Hosting a Community Dinner can feel daunting at the outset. Our guide and accompanying resources are designed to provide you with answers to any questions you may have throughout the process (and if you come up with a question that we don't cover—*let us know!*).

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY DINNER?

A TFDP Community Dinner is an event that brings together different families in the same community, neighborhood, school, faith-based organization or any other setting. The families may already know each other, or they may be meeting for the first time. Families come in all shapes and sizes and all are welcome.

WHO CAN HOST A COMMUNITY DINNER?

Anyone can host an event, including schools, community centers, parenting groups and faith-based organizations. If you've got a group of families, you can have dinner together!

WHY SHOULD WE HOST A COMMUNITY 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 positively impact their minds, bodies and spirits?

Regular family dinners have been shown to significantly impact all of these.

Hosting a Community Dinner is a great way to bring people together for food, fun and conversation and jumpstart new family dinner habits. Community Dinners help families learn to have healthier, more meaningful meals using a fun and structured model that's easy to follow. After the event, families go home with lots of new tips and tricks they can use at their own dinner tables to improve their well-being, one dinner at a time.

IS HOSTING A COMMUNITY DINNER DIFFICULT?

Hosting any kind of group event requires planning and organization, but our time-tested Community Dinner model is simple and effective -- and it can be customized to your unique needs. Everything you need to plan a successful event is included within the following pages!



Planning Your Community Dinner

LET'S GET STARTED!

Prep Notes

WHO?

The community is a key part of having a Community Dinner! Make sure to communicate early and often with the people you invite to your event.

- [Sample invitations](#) »
- Send reminders so families don't forget! Consider using email, Eventbrite or Facebook to make it easy and convenient.
- Make sure to have a plan for guests with food allergies or dietary restrictions.

WHAT?

Every TFDP Community Dinner follows a basic agenda of food, fun and conversation. Check out our [sample agenda](#) » and use it as a guide for planning your dinner.

WHEN AND WHERE?

A Community Dinner doesn't have to be a "dinner" at all; you could make it a breakfast or picnic lunch if that works best! Plan to have guests there for about 2 hours.

If you don't have a space already in mind for your event, check out our [tips for finding the best location for your TFDP Community Dinner](#). »

HOW?

We've got all the resources you need to help you pull off a great event!

[Community Dinner Checklist](#) »

All your to-dos, with a helpful timeline to keep you on track.

[Set-up Guide](#) »

Your list of important supplies and organizing tips to get your space ready for the main event.

[Forms For Your Function](#) »

Important documents you'll need when your guests arrive.



Food

It's the first ingredient in food, fun and conversation -- but what should you serve? How much do you need? And what will it cost?

Don't worry: A memorable event can happen at any price point. We've included a helpful *budget breakdown* that can help you plan for expenses, but remember -- there are always options that can help you lower costs!

LOW-BUDGET TIPS AND TRICKS

Try a potluck!

Whether you ask everyone attending to bring a dish to contribute to the meal, or you provide a main dish item for everyone and ask families to round out the dinner with paper goods, beverages and side dishes, a potluck model is a smart way to work within a limited budget.

Ask for donations. »

Local grocery stores, community gardens, restaurants, farms and other food producers are often willing to provide food. You may be able to get part or all of your meal provided if you ask around!

What you choose to serve will depend on your budget, food preferences and the limitations of your space. Start by choosing the statement(s) below that most closely match your needs, then click the links to explore the possibilities!

The space I've chosen has a full kitchen available for our use. »

The space I've chosen has limited kitchen facilities that we can use to prep and reheat food. »

The space I've chosen has no kitchen facilities available for our use. »



Fun

Fun might be the most important ingredient for a successful Community Dinner! Food brings people to the table, but fun is the thing that keeps them there -- and makes them want to share a meal with others again and again.

TO KEEP THE FUN FLOWING:

Before the meal:

Select one or two **Appetizer Activities** to have available for families to enjoy while your guests are gathering. »

During the meal:

Print these simple table games and put them on the tables, so families can try them out during your event. »

After the meal:

Choose a few group games that you'll play with the children while adults are engaging in a grownups-only discussion. »

TFDP FAVORITE

TWO TRUTHS AND A TALL TALE

Ask everyone in the group to say three things about themselves: two true things and one thing that's made up. The rest of the table will guess which is the tall tale!



Conversation

“HELP...WHAT DO WE TALK ABOUT?”

As anyone who’s ever struggled with “How was your day?...Fine...” knows, conversation starters are a crucial part of setting the scene for a great shared meal. Keep the awkward silences and one-word answers at bay:

Print these suggested conversation starters and place them in jars on the dining tables. »»

Encourage people to get to know each other better through interviews! »»

Print and distribute these interview sheets, or set the tables with interview placemats before guests arrive.

Send families home with more conversation ideas! »»

Consider having some Recipe for Conversation cards available for take-home use.

TFDP FAVORITE

If you could have any superpower, what would it be?



Enjoy and Share!

To make sure you enjoy the event as much as your guests, it's smart to enlist some help! Try to make sure you have someone available to fill each of these roles:

GREETER

This person (or people) runs your welcome table and makes sure all the photo releases and sign-in sheets are filled out, families have nametags and everyone knows where to go when they arrive.

Photo Releases »

Sign-in Sheets »

FACILITATOR

This is usually the host (that's you!). The facilitator keeps the event moving on schedule and runs the facilitated discussion portion of the evening.

Make sure to check out our Discussion and Facilitation Tips! »

KID WRANGLER

This person (or people, depending on the number and ages of the children) is in charge of entertaining the kids while the adults are having their discussion. They'll be responsible for group games and the dessert activity.

FOOD HELPERS

These are the people who will help you prepare and set out your food.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Don't forget to take photos! Designating one or two people to get some shots of your event is a good way to make sure you don't get too busy to document your dinner. (But remember: Before sharing on social media, make sure you've got signed photo releases!)

Photography Tips:

We love to get pictures from TFDP Community Dinners! When taking photos, it's a good idea to try and capture special moments and details. Some of our best pictures have been of:

- Food. Whether it's pictures of the dinner itself or images of your guests making an appetizer, food photography is a great way to showcase the dinner.
- Fun. Great shots of families having fun together is always a good way to share highlights from your event.
- Conversation. Shots of the notes from the discussion, or images of parents engaged in lively conversation are a really helpful way to share the impact of the evening.

- The details. Activities, set-ups, handmade signs and any details that make your Community Dinner uniquely yours!

Clean-up Crew

Don't let everyone leave a mess for you to deal with! Make sure you have a few people who are planning to stay after the event to help you clean up the space. (Even better: ask folks to help throughout the evening to minimize clean up at the end!)



Social Media Sharing Tips

We love to see organizations sharing about their TFDP Community Dinners! Here are some top do's and don'ts to help you share well:

DO:

- Tag TFDP, so we can see what you've shared!
Facebook: @TheFamilyDinnerProject;
Twitter: @FDP_Tweets.
- Share photos as long as you've got photo releases.
- Share before, during and after your event.

DON'T:

- Use names or identifying characteristics of people who attend your event.
- Share photos of people without their consent.
- Share the negatives! Keep your social sharing fun and positive, just like your Community Dinner!



Digest

After a great meal, it's always important to take some time to let everything settle! Follow up on your Community Dinner within a week of the event:

- Let us know how it went! Send your sign-in sheets and a final attendance count to TFDP so we can keep track of how many families have enjoyed food, fun and conversation at Community Dinners around the world.
- Thank your guests. Send everyone a follow-up email to let them know how much you appreciated their attendance, and to give them some options for connecting with TFDP and our online resources so they can keep working towards their family dinner goals.
We've provided a sample email you can use. »
- Consider doing it again! If you enjoyed your Community Dinner, you might want to host another in the future. **Check out our special theme dinners to put a new twist on your food, fun and conversation for next time! »**

THANK YOU!

Thank you for hosting a TFDP Community Dinner! People like you who spread our mission through events in their own communities are vital to the work we do. If you have any questions about the contents of this guide, or about The Family Dinner Project and our work, please [contact us](#).

THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT



Your Guide to Hosting a Community Dinner



Tips and Tools



PREPARATION

Community Dinner Sample Invitation

YOU'RE INVITED!

[Organization name] and The Family Dinner Project are thrilled to invite you and your family to a Community Dinner at [location] on [date] from [time]!

Research shows what parents have known for a long time: Sharing family meals is good for the spirit, brain and health of the entire family. The benefits of family meals include: better academic performance, higher self-esteem, greater sense of resilience. In addition, children who eat dinner with their families have lower risk of substance abuse, depression, disordered eating and rates of obesity!

At the Community Dinner, families will get hands-on time in the kitchen making a family meal. While we wait for the food, we'll enjoy some fun games and conversation. We are looking forward to getting to know each other, having fun and sharing some tools in improve our family meals!

If you and your family are interested in joining us for a night of food, fun and conversation, please contact [name] at [phone or email address] by [date]. Space is limited, so we look forward to hearing from you soon!

We hope to see you there!

[insert signature here]

[Name]

[Title]

[Organization]

Sample Community Dinner Agenda

Every TFDP Community Dinner includes food, fun and conversation. Here's a sample agenda to show you how the event might flow.

5:30 PM

Guests check in

5:30–6:00 PM

Guests make appetizer and do activities at their tables »

6:00 PM

Facilitator welcomes everyone to the event

6:10–6:40 PM

(About 30 minutes)

Families eat dinner

6:40–7:10 PM

(About 30 minutes)

Children's Group Games »
and Dessert Activity »

6:40–7:10 PM

(About 30 minutes -- simultaneous with Children's activities)

Discussion for Adults »

7:10–7:30 PM

(About 20 minutes)

Families reunite and eat dessert

7:30 PM

Wrap-up and thanks

Total Time: 2 hours

Location, Location, Location

If you don't have a space already picked out for hosting your Community Dinner, you'll need to find a location. Good host locations are generally places like school cafeterias, church halls and other community gathering spaces.

General Guidelines for Choosing a Space:

- Is it big enough for your intended number of people?
 - Are there enough tables and chairs on site? Who will set them up and break them down?
 - Is this a good, comfortable gathering space for your audience? Can they get there easily? How's the parking? Is the space accessible for people with physical mobility challenges?
-

Also, when choosing a location, make sure to discuss the following points with the contact person. While some of these items might seem obvious, you don't want any surprises or miscommunications!

- What is the policy on serving food? Are there any food items you can't have on site? (Some houses of worship prohibit certain foods due to religious beliefs, while other locations might have guidelines you'll need to follow based on allergy concerns.)
 - Who will be responsible for making sure the space is open and accessible at the agreed-upon time?
 - Who will be responsible for locking up after the event is over?
 - What is the arrangement for set-up and cleanup? Who will be responsible for making sure the requirements are followed?
 - If there is a kitchen on site, is it available for your use? Are there any regulations or rules that need to be followed?
 - If there are dishes, serving utensils, and other useful items on site, are they available for your use?
 - What about items like trash bags and cleaning supplies? Are those items available to you, or should you bring your own?
 - Is there a rental fee required for using the site?
-

TIP

Keep in mind that when you set the time for your event, the dinner itself will last about 2 hours from start to finish. You'll also need to build in set-up and cleanup time, so make sure to work that out with your venue.

Community Dinner Planning Guide

4 Weeks to Event:

- Find a location
- Pick a date
TIP: pick a date at least a month away. Run the date by the contact person at the event location
- Invite families
TIP: be sure to ask about food allergies
- Find volunteers
Note: The number of volunteers will depend a bit on how many families will be invited. We suggest 1 volunteer per table, so typically this would mean a total of 6-8 volunteers
- Reach out to *The Family Dinner Project* to get program resources for your event

2-3 Weeks to Event:

- Determine your menu for the evening
Tip: We have found that tacos work well - put together “assembly line” style. Our *sample shopping list* can help you plan.
- Determine where food and supplies will come from
Tip: There are often groups willing to provide food, like local restaurants, community gardens, or even grocery stores.

Tip: Attempt to have local stores donate other supplies as well, such as plates, napkins, utensils (if not provided by the location), etc.
- Start to think about room set-up
- Schedule the evening
Tip: It’s helpful to have a clear plan for the night, but be prepared for things to go differently. With many families in one room, flexibility is key. Our *sample agenda* is a good starting point.

1 Week to Event:

- Reach out to families that will be attending the event
Tip: Tell them how excited you are for the event and ask them if they have any questions or concerns about the evening.
- Check out the space (if you haven’t already)
Tip: Find out where things are located, like tables, chairs, light switches, and outlets. Think about the layout of the room and where you will set up sign-in, dinner tables, and food prep stations
- Check in with the team (volunteers, facilitator, etc)
Tip: Make sure everyone knows times, dates, expectations, and any other logistics that are necessary for the event. Go over the schedule so everyone is on the same page
- Shop for any items that were not donated

-
- Print copies of the agenda for all volunteers
 - Put together materials for families to take home

Day Before Event:

- Finalize food plans
Tip: Check in with everyone to make sure that everything is ready for tomorrow
- Review the agenda
Tip: Have a printed copy to bring along on the day of. This will probably change as the night goes on, but it helps to have a plan in place. Transitions tend to take longer than you expect - it will be helpful to know what you can do without in case you fall behind schedule.

1 Week After Event:

- Send families thank you email with links to TFDP resources
- Send TFDP a copy of your sign-in sheet and final head count
Tip: If you have any pictures or great anecdotes from the event, you should share them with the TFDP team as well so they can publicize your work!

Item Checklist:

- Tables: round tables are best, but any table will do in a pinch
 - Chairs: Have a few extra chairs just in case grandma or some friends show up
 - Dishes, glassware, silverware: Real dishes make dinner special, but paper is just fine too.
Tip: It is easiest if you can host at a location with dishes available for use
 - Tablecloths: Something simple works nicely
Tip: See if you can borrow from friends and family. Don't be afraid of mismatching! Different tablecloths will give each table its own look and feel, and create atmosphere.
 - Serving utensils and dishware: Be sure to think through what you might need
 - Table decorations: Flowers, candles (real or battery powered) and name cards are great.
Tip: Decorations can be anything that will make the table feel special, and show families how little touches can make a big difference.
 - Napkins: Cloth or paper be sure you have them!
 - Salt & pepper shakers
 - Nametags
Tip: A great habit to get into at the beginning of the night is to hand out nametags, so everyone can get to know each other
 - Markers/pens: Have them on hand for nametags and other activities
 - Food containers: You will need serving dishes for each portion of the meal
 - Microphone or bell: use it to get everyone's attention in a noisy room
-

Event Set-Up Guide

Setting up the space for your Community Dinner is an important step in making sure the event runs smoothly! These tips and supply list should help you get organized.

How much space do I need?

Your main goal should be to make sure you have enough tables and chairs for everyone to sit and eat comfortably. Additionally, you'll want to have some tables for serving, as well as a table or other area for check-in when your guests arrive. Everything else can happen in and around your eating area!

Supply and Set-up List

- Tables
 - Chairs
 - Table coverings
 - A list of attendees with:
 - Photo release forms »
 - Event sign-in sheet »
 - Pens
 - Nametags
 - Markers
 - Ingredients and materials for your chosen Appetizer Activity »
 - Serving dishes and utensils
 - Napkins
 - Eating utensils
 - Plates
 - Cups
 - Food and beverages
 - Conversation jars »
 - Additional fun and conversation resources (optional) »
 - An easel with paper or whiteboard
 - Markers for whiteboard, if necessary
 - Microphone (optional -- this depends on your space and number of attendees)
 - Plenty of paper towels and quick cleanup supplies
 - Ingredients and materials for your chosen dessert activity »
-



**FORMS FOR
YOUR FUNCTION**

Release Form for Media Recording

I, the undersigned, do hereby consent and agree that [insert organization name here], its employees, or agents have the right to take photographs, videotape, or digital recordings of me beginning on [insert event date] and ending on [insert date here], and to use these in any and all media, now or hereafter known, and exclusively for the purpose of their website, literature, promotional and fundraising activities. I further consent that my name and identity may be revealed therein or by descriptive text or commentary.

I do hereby release to [insert organization name here], its agents, and employees all rights to exhibit this work in print and electronic form publicly or privately and to market and sell copies. I waive any rights, claims, or interest I may have to control the use of my identity or likeness in whatever media used. I understand that there will be no financial or other remuneration for recording me, either for initial or subsequent transmission or playback.

I also understand that [insert organization name here] is not responsible for any expense or liability incurred as a result of my participation in this recording, including medical expenses due to any sickness or injury incurred as a result.

I represent that I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understand the foregoing statement, and am competent to execute this agreement.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Signature: _____

Guardian's signature if person is under age of 18: _____

Can we contact you at this number to follow up between events? Yes: ____ No: ____

Sample In-kind Donation Letter

Dear [Insert name here],

[Insert organization or initiative name here] is seeking in-kind donations for our upcoming Community Dinner event on [Insert date here]. This dinner will be hosted by [organization name] in partnership with The Family Dinner Project, and will help families in our community understand the importance of joining together at the table for a nightly meal.

[Insert organizational background info here]

With your generous support, we'll be able to support the families that keep our community vibrant and strong, and empower them to build community through their own dinner tables.

The theme for our dinner is [dinner theme]. Will you help us support local families on [date of event] by making an in-kind donation? Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. [Organization name]'s tax ID is [insert tax ID here].

Please feel free to contact me directly at [phone number or email] with any questions or concerns regarding your contribution. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Title]

[Organization name]

[attach list of items needed]



FOOD

Sample Community Dinner Budget (for 45 people)

Menu: Tacos w/guacamole

Total Cost	\$797.57			
Food	\$505.00			
Paper Goods	\$33.08			
Materials	\$259.49			
Food Costs				
<i>Item</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>QTY</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Purpose/Notes</i>
Avocados	\$2.00	15	\$30.00	Guacamole
Lemons	\$0.89	10	\$8.90	Guacamole
Salt	\$1.99	1	\$1.99	Guacamole
Garlic (bulbs)	\$0.70	3	\$2.10	Guacamole
Tortilla chips	\$2.99	10	\$29.90	Guacamole
Ground beef (qty in lbs)	\$7.49	12	\$89.88	Tacos: 1/4lb meat per person
Taco seasoning	\$1.00	12	\$12.00	Tacos
Beans (canned or refried)	\$1.50	15	\$22.50	Tacos: 1/4 cup of beans per person
Shredded cheese	\$3.99	5	\$19.95	Tacos: 2-3oz per person
Salsa (24oz)	\$3.99	4	\$15.96	Tacos: 2oz per person
Tomatoes (qty in lbs)	\$4.99	3	\$14.97	Tacos
Iceburg lettuce	\$2.99	2	\$5.98	Tacos
Sour cream	\$2.99	5	\$14.95	Tacos: 2-3oz per person
Taco shells	\$2.69	8	\$21.52	Tacos: 2 shells per person
Whipping cream (qty in pints)	\$3.99	8	\$31.92	Dessert
Mixed berries (qty in pints)	\$2.99	27	\$80.73	Dessert
Confectioners sugar	\$1.99	1	\$1.99	Dessert
Water	\$4.99	4	\$19.96	Beverages
Lemonade	\$3.99	10	\$39.90	Beverages: 16 oz/ person
Juice	\$3.99	10	\$39.90	Beverages: 16 oz/ person
Total Food Cost	\$505.00			
Paper Goods				
<i>Item</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>QTY</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Purpose/Notes</i>
Plates	\$2.00	15	\$2.99	45 plates per pack
Napkins	\$0.89	10	\$2.15	250 napkins per pack
Cups	\$1.99	1	\$3.99	50 cups per pack
Plastic dinnerware	\$0.70	3	\$6.99	144 pieces (forks/knives/spoons) per pack
Total Paper Goods Cost	\$33.08			
Materials				
<i>Item</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>QTY</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Purpose/Notes</i>
Ball jars	\$9.89	1	\$9.89	conversation jars: 12 per pack
Printing: conversation starters	\$0.09	10	\$0.90	conversation jars: 1 set per table (b&w printing)
Printing: placemats	\$0.73	50	\$36.50	dinner activity: one per person + extras (color printing)
Printing: evening agenda	\$0.73	50	\$36.50	one per person + extras (color printing)
Printing: FDP newsletter	\$1.10	128	\$140.80	one per family + extras (4 pages, double sided, color printing)
Crayons/markers	\$3.49	10	\$34.90	dinner activity: one 16 crayon pack per table
Total Materials cost	\$259.49			



Community Dinner Menu Options

From No Kitchen Facilities to Full Kitchen Facilities





Not having access to kitchen facilities may feel like a big challenge, but we've had many successful Community Dinners that happened without a kitchen! The key is to try to work with as many pre-prepped and already-cooked items as possible, or to move all prep and cooking offsite if possible.

Menu 1: Mediterranean-style Picnic



Appetizer: Make tzatziki (Greek yogurt and cucumber dip) »»

Main Course: Build-Your-Own Wraps and Salads

Suggested Menu Options:

- Rotisserie chickens
- Whole-grain tortillas, pitas and breads
- Hummus
- Lettuce
- Diced tomatoes
- Sliced red onions
- Olives
- Roasted red peppers
- Feta and mozzarella cheeses
- Salad dressings

Dessert Activity: Build-Your-Own Yogurt Parfaits »»

OR: Fruit Kebabs with Whipped Cream »»



Menu 2: Tex-Mex Taco Bar



Appetizer: Make guacamole »»

Main Course: Build-Your-Own Tacos and Chili Bowls

Suggested Menu Options:

- Rotisserie chickens
- Taco shells and/or tortillas
- Shredded cheese
- Shredded lettuce
- Diced tomatoes
- Salsa
- Sour Cream
- Black olives
- Chili*

*Tip! You can make or purchase chili ahead of time and warm it up in slow cookers on-site, if you have a place to safely plug in slow cookers.

Dessert Activity: Build-Your-Own Apple Nachos »»

OR: Fruit Kebabs with Whipped Cream »»



Limited Kitchen Facilities

In the limited-kitchen setup, there's often access to counter space for food prep, as well as sinks for cleanup and some areas where you might be able to reheat food or plug in slow cookers. Taking advantage of the opportunity to keep things warm can help you expand your menu offerings without a significant amount of extra work!

Menu 1: Tex-Mex Taco Bar



Appetizer: Make guacamole >>

Main Course: Build-Your-Own Tacos and Chili Bowls

Suggested Menu Options:

- Taco meat *
- Beans (refried or black beans) *
- Chili *
- Taco shells and/or tortillas
- Shredded cheese
- Shredded lettuce
- Diced tomatoes
- Salsa

- Sour Cream
- Black olives

***Tip!** Make the meat, beans and chili off-site and heat up or keep warm at your venue by using slow cookers or stovetops, if available. This is also a great opportunity to enlist help: What about asking volunteers to cook for a chili potluck, for example?

Dessert Activity: Build-Your-Own Apple Nachos >>

OR: Fruit Kebabs with Whipped Cream >>



Menu 2: Soup and Salad Sampler



Appetizer: Make bruschetta »

Main Course: Choice of soups and Build-Your-Own Salad Bar

Suggested Menu Options:

- Pots or slow cookers of 2-3 soups: Tomato, Chicken Noodle, and Minestrone or Cream of Broccoli are popular choices! *
- Crackers
- Lettuce
- Chopped Tomatoes
- Sliced cucumbers
- Sliced red onion

- Bell pepper strips
- Shredded cheese
- Salad dressings

*Tip! This is a good opportunity to organize a potluck among volunteers, or to seek donations of soup from local restaurants or groceries!

Dessert Activity: Build-Your-Own Fruit “Sundaes” »



Menu 3: Italian Sandwich Night



Appetizer: Antipasto Kebabs »»

Main Course: Build-Your-Own Sub Sandwiches

Suggested Menu Options:

- Slow cookers of meatballs in marinara sauce and/or sausage and peppers
 - Deli meats: Salami, pepperoni, turkey, ham
 - Mozzarella and provolone cheeses
 - Lettuce
 - Sliced tomatoes
 - Thinly sliced onions
 - Sandwich condiments (mayonnaise, mustard)
 - Sub rolls
-

Dessert Activity: Build-Your-Own Banana Boats »»

OR: Fruit "Sundaes" »»



With a full kitchen, there are many options available -- almost too many! You can certainly use your imagination, but we suggest sticking to one of the following menus for your first Community Dinner. While being able to cook everything on-site can make the planning easier and can help keep your costs lower, it can also mean more work to prep, cook and clean up. Make sure that you have plenty of volunteers available to help with the cooking!

Menu 1: Tex-Mex Taco Bar



Appetizer: Make guacamole »

Main Course: Build-Your-Own Tacos and Chili Bowls

Suggested Menu Options:

- Taco meat
 - Beans (refried or black beans)
 - Chili
 - Taco shells and/or tortillas
 - Shredded cheese
 - Shredded lettuce
 - Diced tomatoes
 - Salsa
 - Sour Cream
 - Black olives
-

Dessert Activity: Build-Your-Own Apple Nachos »

OR: Fruit Kebabs with Whipped Cream »



Menu 2: Soup and Salad Sampler



Appetizer: Make bruschetta »

Main Course: Choice of soups and Build-Your-Own Salad Bar

Suggested Menu Options:

- Pots or slow cookers of 2-3 soups: Tomato, Chicken Noodle, and Minestrone or Cream of Broccoli are popular choices!
 - Crackers
 - Lettuce
 - Chopped Tomatoes
 - Sliced cucumbers
 - Sliced red onion
 - Bell pepper strips
 - Shredded cheese
 - Salad dressings
-

Dessert Activity: Build-Your-Own Fruit “Sundaes” »



Menu 3: Pasta Night



Appetizer: Make bruschetta »

OR: tzatziki (Greek yogurt and cucumber dip) »

Main Course: Build-Your-Own pasta or lasagna*

Suggested Menu Options:

- Marinara Sauce
- Meatballs
- Pesto sauce
- Grated parmesan cheese
- Steamed or roasted vegetables (broccoli, carrots, peppers)
- Diced tomatoes
- Fresh spinach
- Cooked pasta (for pasta bar only)
- Ricotta cheese (for lasagna only)
- Shredded mozzarella cheese

- Wonton wrappers (for lasagna only)
- Miniature loaf pans (for lasagna only)

*Tip! For build-your-own lasagna, have each guest place a layer of sauce in the bottom of a miniature loaf pan. Then layer wonton wrappers on top of the sauce (to act as noodles); top with ricotta cheese and your choice of vegetables, meatball pieces, sauce, and mozzarella. Continue layering wonton wrappers, fillings and sauce, ending with a layer of wonton, sauce, and finally mozzarella cheese on top. Bake the individual lasagnas at 400 degrees for 20-30 minutes to heat them through and cook the wonton wrappers.

Dessert Activity: Build-Your-Own Banana boats »

OR: Fruit Kebabs with Whipped Cream »



Menu 4: Pizza Night



Appetizer: Make tzatziki (Greek yogurt and cucumber dip) »»

OR: Antipasto kebabs »»

Main Course: Build-Your-Own Pizzas

Suggested Menu Options:

- Pizza dough OR an already-cooked option: English muffins, bagels, pitas
- Shredded mozzarella cheese
- Pizza sauce
- Meatballs or sausage
- Pepperoni

- Sliced mushrooms, onions, peppers, tomatoes
- Fresh spinach
- Fresh basil

Have each guest create their own pizza. Bake according to the directions that come with the dough you've selected, or bake English muffin/bagel/pita pizzas at 400 degrees for 10-15 minutes, until the cheese is melted and bubbly.

Dessert Activity: Chocolate Dipped Fruit »»

OR: Build-Your-Own Yogurt Parfaits »»

Appetizer Activities

One of the most important parts of a successful Community Dinner is sharing in the preparation -- and eating! -- of an appetizer. We've found that families love to gather and work together to make something they can all enjoy, and kids in particular are excited to taste something that they've helped to create.

These appetizers are all healthy, tasty and easy to make with or without kitchen facilities. While we've suggested

certain appetizer choices with each of our menu options, feel free to mix and match, choosing the appetizer that sounds like the most fun for your event!

Please note: Each set-up and recipe is intended for a table of 6-8 people.



Tzatziki (Greek yogurt and cucumber dip)



Set-up

- 1 small grater
- 2 small bowls
- 6-8 small spoons
- A small stack of paper towels
- 1 bowl or plate of lemon wedges
- 1 plate of seasonings: 1 tsp. Minced garlic, a spoonful of salt, a spoonful of ground black pepper
- 1 plate with half of a long English cucumber, chopped into 2-4 easy to handle pieces
- 1 cup yogurt
- 1 plate of Pita chips or wedges
- 1 plate of raw vegetables -- carrot and celery sticks, bell pepper strips, cherry tomatoes

Recipe/Activity Directions

1. Direct each group to wash hands first!
2. Ask each group to grate the cucumber pieces.
3. Ask participants to transfer the grated cucumber to paper towels.
4. Demonstrate how to carefully squeeze the moisture from the cucumber, using one of the small bowls to help catch the run-off.
5. Direct each group to place their squeezed cucumber into the other small bowl and mix in the yogurt.
6. Advise participants to slowly add garlic, salt, pepper and lemon juice, stirring well and tasting until they have a mixture they like.
7. Enjoy the tzatziki as a dip for pita and vegetables!





Guacamole



Set-up

- 2 bowls
- 6-8 spoons
- 2 forks
- 1 small plate of seasonings: 1 spoonful of salt, 2 teaspoons minced garlic, 2 halved limes or 1 halved lemon
- 2 avocados
- 1 paring knife*
- Optional: 1 small bowl each of chopped tomatoes and diced red onion
- 1 large bowl or basket of tortilla chips

**If preferred, you can have participants bring their avocados to an organizer to be cut open.*

Tip:

Build guacamole “kits”. Instead of putting all the utensils on the table, prepare each tables’ avocado, garlic and lemon beforehand and place them in containers on each of the tables. Just remember to keep the pit in the avocado - it keeps it from turning brown!

Recipe/Activity Directions

1. Direct each group to wash hands first!
2. Either direct participants to bring avocados to an organizer to be cut open, or demonstrate for adult guests how to properly cut open an avocado (lengthwise, around the pit). **Omit this step if you’ve put together guacamole kits.**
3. Show groups how to scoop out the avocado into the two bowls on their tables, discarding the pits and skins.
4. Demonstrate how to mash the avocado with forks.
5. Advise groups to add lime or lemon juice, salt and garlic carefully, stirring well and tasting until they have a mixture they like.
6. If using, instruct groups to add chopped onion and tomato to their guacamole as preferred.
7. Enjoy the guacamole as a dip for chips!





Bruschetta



Set-up

- 1 large plate or basket of sliced baguette or Italian bread
- 6-8 small plates
- 6-8 spoons
- 2 pairs of kid-safe scissors
- 2 bowls of diced tomatoes
- 1 small plate of seasonings: 2 tsp. Minced garlic, 2 spoonfuls of salt, 2 spoonfuls of pepper
- 1 small bowl of olive oil
- 1 small plate or bowl of fresh basil leaves (about 12 basil leaves)
- Parmesan cheese (optional)
- 1 small grater (if providing cheese)

Recipe/Activity Directions

1. Direct each group to wash hands first!
2. Instruct groups to use kid-safe scissors to snip the basil leaves into small pieces.
3. Ask participants to add basil, garlic, salt and pepper carefully to each bowl of tomatoes, stirring and tasting until they have a mixture they like.
4. Direct groups to drizzle 2-3 spoonfuls of olive oil into the tomato mixture and stir well.
5. Demonstrate how to top slices of bread with the tomato mixture and garnish with parmesan cheese (if using) and more olive oil, as desired.
6. Enjoy making and eating bruschetta!





Antipasto Kebabs



Set-up

- 24 Lollipop sticks (available online or at craft stores -- much safer than skewers!)
- 6-8 Small plates
- 1 bowl of cherry tomatoes
- 1 bowl of mozzarella cheese cubes or balls
- 1 plate of fresh basil or spinach leaves
- 1 bowl or plate of chopped bell peppers
- 1 plate of seasonings: 1 tsp. Minced garlic, 1 spoonful each of salt and pepper
- 2 empty small bowls
- 1 small bowl each of olive oil and either balsamic or red wine vinegar

Recipe/Activity Directions

1. Direct each group to wash hands first!
2. Demonstrate how to thread vegetables, cheese, and basil or spinach leaves onto lollipop sticks to make colorful skewers.
3. Instruct each group to make the dipping sauce in their 2 empty bowls: Add 1 spoonful of vinegar for every 2 spoonfuls of olive oil, the mix in garlic, salt and pepper to taste.
4. Enjoy making, dipping and eating antipasto kebabs!



Dessert Activities



During a TFDP Community Dinner, there's a portion of the event where kids and parents are separated for the two post-dinner activities. Adults usually engage in a facilitated discussion, while the kids play games and prepare a dessert to serve to their families. We always suggest using fruit as the basis of a yummy dessert, to help illustrate that there's a place for healthy choices throughout the whole meal.

One of the most popular TFDP dessert activities involves making whipped cream in a very unusual -- and fun! -- way. You can use this activity in many of our dessert options. There's always room for 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!





Yogurt Parfaits



Set-up

- Cups, bowls and spoons -- you want at least one per guest, as the kids will make not only their own desserts but dessert for their grown-ups as well.
- Large containers of yogurt -- plain vanilla works best, but you can also choose banana or berry flavors.
- Several bowls of different cut-up fruit (berries, bananas, etc.)
- Several bowls of assorted toppings:
 - Dried fruit
 - Cookie crumbs
 - Dry cereal
 - Chocolate chips
 - Chopped nuts or coconut flakes
- Whipped cream (optional)

Recipe/Activity Directions

1. Help children scoop yogurt into the bottoms of the cups or bowls.
2. Show them how to layer their parfaits with fruits, different topping choices and more yogurt.
3. Top with whipped cream, if using.



Fruit Kebabs



Set-up

- Lollipop sticks (available online or from craft stores -- much safer than skewers!)
- Small plates or bowls and spoons
- Cut-up fruit (berries, banana chunks, grapes, chunks of melon)
- Whipped cream

Recipe/Activity Directions

1. Show the children how to carefully thread fruit onto the lollipop sticks to make colorful kebabs.
2. Have them make 2-3 kebabs per person.
3. Place the kebabs in individual bowls or plates, then garnish the plates with whipped cream.





Apple Nachos



Set-up

- Small plates
- Spoons
- Several bowls of sliced apples
- Several bowls of assorted toppings:
 - Nut butters
 - Chocolate and caramel syrups
 - Cut-up berries
 - Chocolate chips
 - Chopped nuts or coconut flakes

Recipe/Activity Directions

1. Help the children place apple slices in a single layer on the plates.
2. Show them how to top their apples with their preferred toppings.
3. Enjoy!



Build-Your-Own Fruit Sundaes



Set-up

- Small bowls and spoons
- Several bowls of cut-up fruit (bananas, berries, diced apples)
- Several bowls of assorted toppings:
 - Chocolate and caramel syrups
 - Small candies or sprinkles
 - Chopped nuts
 - Whipped cream

Recipe/Activity Directions

1. Help the children fill the small bowls with the fruit of their choice.
2. Allow them to pile on the toppings to make “sundaes” without the ice cream!





Banana Boats



Set-up

- Small plates
- Spoons
- One banana per guest, split in half lengthwise (like a banana split)
- Several bowls of assorted toppings:
 - Mini-marshmallows
 - Chocolate chips
 - Chocolate and caramel syrups
 - Raisins
 - Chopped nuts
- Whipped cream (optional)

Recipe/Activity Directions

1. Show the children how to fill their split bananas with toppings.
2. Allow them to fill the bananas and top with whipped cream!



Chocolate-Dipped Fruit



Set-up

- Lollipop sticks
- Small bowls and spoons
- Small plates
- Heatproof containers
- Chocolate chips
- Heavy cream
- Cut-up fruit (bananas, berries, apples, pears, orange slices)

Recipe/Activity Directions

1. An adult should combine the chocolate chips and heavy cream in a heatproof container – you'll need about 3 tablespoons of cream for every cup of chocolate chips.
2. Melt the chocolate and cream gently together. In a microwave, start with 1 minute, then stir and continue heating for 30 seconds at a time, stirring after each interval, until the mixture is smooth and pourable. (You can add a little more cream if it's too stiff.) If not using a microwave, we recommend using a double boiler and stirring the mixture frequently.
3. Pour each child their own small bowl of melted chocolate ganache.
4. Show the children how to dip pieces of fruit in the chocolate. If there's any difficulty grasping certain fruits, help them use the lollipop sticks to skewer the fruit and dip it into the chocolate.
5. Have the kids place their dipped fruit on plates for serving.





FUN



DINNER GAMES

TWO TRUTHS & A TALL TALE

Ask everyone at the table to say three things about themselves: two true things and one thing that's made up. The rest of the table will guess which is the tall tale. Sometimes this game is easier if everyone gets a chance to write down their three things before sharing.



DINNER GAMES

ALPHABET GAME

As a group, choose a category, either animal, country singers, or “people who know our family.” A family member starts the game by naming a person or thing in the category that begins with the letter “A” Then the next person names a person or thing that starts with the letter “B”, the next person finds something with the letter “C” and so on.





DINNER GAMES

WOULD YOU RATHER?

Taking turns, ask: 'Would You Rather...?' You can buy a book of these questions or invent them as a family. Some ideas to start:

- Would you rather be invisible or be able to fly?
- Would you rather sweat melted cheese or smell skunk?
- Would you rather be able to swim like a dolphin or run as fast as a leopard?



DINNER GAMES

STORY BY SENTENCE

One person starts a story with one sentence. It can be a traditional story format (“Once upon a time, a huge bear ...”) or something completely original (“A woman carrying a large cake was walking down the street ...”). Go around the table and each person add a sentence to the story. After dinner, you can illustrate the sentences and then place the pictures on the fridge.





DINNER GAMES

WHERE IN THE WORLD

Imagine that everyone at the table has the gift of teleportation, but only have 24 hours. Why in the world would you go? Do you want to bring someone with you? How long will you choose? What would you do there?



DINNER GAMES

HIGGLETY PIGGLETY

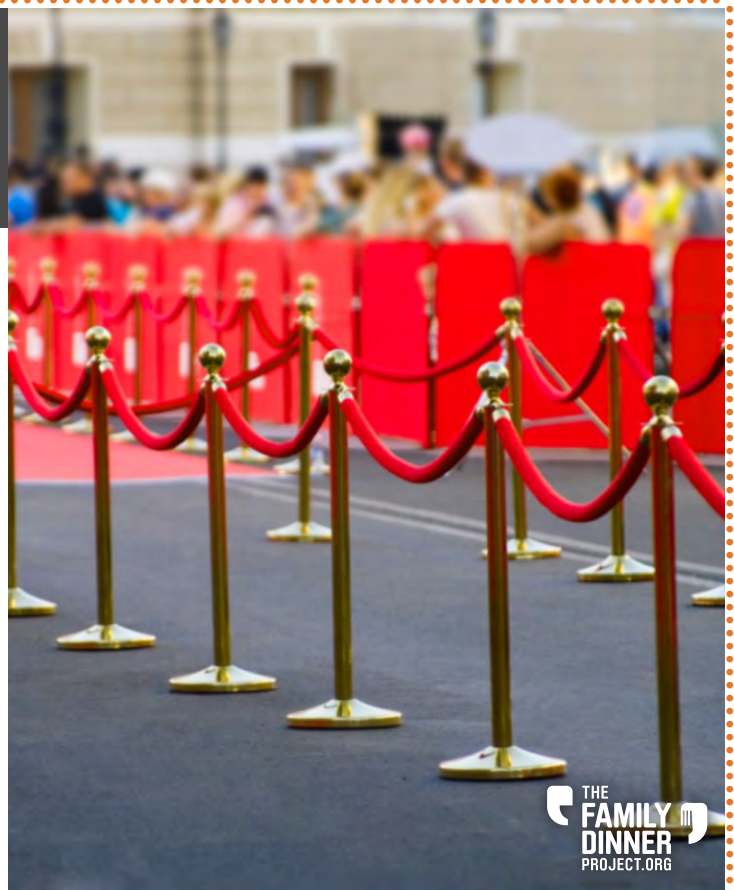
One person thinks of a rhyming pair of words, like Funny Bunny. Then the person gives clues that are synonyms for the two words — hilarious furry mammal. Additionally, the person clues everyone into how many syllables each word is by using the phrases “higglety pigglety” (for 3 syllable words), “higgy piggy” (for 2 syllable words), or “hig pig” (for 1 syllable words). For example, Funny Bunny is a “higgy piggy,” but Old Mold is a “hig pig.” Everyone tries to guess. Whoever gets it first thinks of the next one.





DINNER GAMES CELEBRITY

This is a game of naming people in the public eye. The trick is: the first letter of the celebrity's last name dictates what the first letter of the next person's first name must be. For example, if the first person names "George Washington," the next person might say "Walt Disney," or another celebrity whose name begins with W. Keep going until someone gets stumped. Special challenge: if you can name someone whose first and last name starts with the same letter — like "Walt Whitman," — then the direction you're going around the table in reverses. This game also works with geography — simply use the last letter of the place named as the first letter of the next place. For example, "Kentucky" could lead to "Yemen."



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DINNER GAMES DIFFERENT DRUMMERS

Pick one person to be the leader. The Leader begins tapping a beat on the table (or clapping). The others around the table begin tapping or clapping along with the Leader. The Leader can change the beat whenever they choose, and everyone else must follow suit. Then, without warning, the Leader stops drumming. The last person to stop drumming is out.

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THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT
Community Dinner Guide



DINNER GAMES

I SPY

Start with one person choosing an object, and saying “I spy with my little eye, something...” and then describing the thing. For example, “I spy with my little eye, something... purple!” The other diners have to guess what the person is looking at.





CONVERSATION



Enjoy These Dinnertime Conversation Starters

What's something you couldn't do when you were younger that you can do now?

If you had superpowers, what would they be and how would you use them to help people?

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

Who is your favorite character from a book, movie, or TV show?

If you could be an animal, what would you want to be? Why?

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

If you could have a character from a book, movie, or TV show as a best friend, who would it be? Why?

What are three things that you're good at doing that took a lot of hard work and practice?

What is the greatest song ever written and why?

Do you have a favorite piece of clothing? What makes it special?

What is your favorite season? What do you like about it?

If you were a season, which season would you be and why?

Tell a story about how you got your name.

What does it mean to be brave?

What do you love most about summer?

What is your favorite type of weather?

Who is the funniest person you know?

Do you think it's possible to change one's self? How have you changed over the years/decades?

"After being in Harry Potter, I believe a bit more in magic than I did before," said the actor who played Ron Weasley in the Harry Potter movies. Do you believe in magic? If yes, explain your answer.

Do you think it's possible to change the world? Why or why not?

What do you think are the ideal characteristics for a life partner or spouse?

How does someone act when they are "in love"? (You can use a real person or a book/movie character as an example).

Steven Spielberg is quoted as saying, "All of us every single year, we're a different person. I don't think we're the same person all our lives." Do you agree?





Enjoy These Dinnertime Conversation Starters

Who is/was your favorite teacher? Why?

If you were principal of your school, would you change anything? What?

Would you rather go to your school, or Hogwarts. Why?

Albert Camus said, "In the depth of winter, I learned that there was in me an invincible summer." What do you think he meant? Can you connect this to your own life?

Are you a "summer" person? If not, what season do you think best represents you?

What is your favorite summer food to eat?

What was your favorite thing you did this summer? Why was it your favorite?

Why do we celebrate the 4th of July? What is your favorite part of the holiday?

What do you think about rules? Do you think they're important? What are some rules you have in your home or at school?

Do you think you have too much freedom, or not enough?

Do you feel free to be yourself?

If you could change one thing about your family or about school, what would it be?

In the book Green Eggs and Ham, Sam-I-am refuses to try green eggs and ham. Then he does and he likes them. Has something similar ever happened to you?

Do you have a favorite movie, book or song that deals with change? Why is this your favorite?

The poet Maya Angelou once said, "If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude." What do you think she meant by this? Have you ever had to do this?

Margaret Mead is quoted as saying "Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have." Can you give an example of this from your lifetime?

"As soon as you get over caring what people think, you can have a nice time," said actress Lara Flynn Boyle. Do you care what other people think? In what ways?

Name three springtime activities that make you happy.

What will you miss most about winter?

One of the Beatles' most famous songs is "All You Need is Love." Do you think that's true? What other necessities might you throw in there?

Do you have a favorite love story? Is it from a book, movie or real life? Talk about it.





Enjoy These Dinnertime Conversation Starters

Who or what exemplifies the meaning of “love” to you?

Do you find it easy to say I love you, or hard? Are there times when it’s harder than others?

What personality traits did you get from each of your parents? (ie patient like dad, friendly like mom, etc.)

“I’m content to stand on tradition. I’m even more content to wipe my feet on it,” said author Aaron Allston. What do you think he means? Have you ever felt that way?

When is it especially important to say ‘thank you?’ Do you notice when people thank you, or forget to thank you?

What is your favorite thing in the world to do? Why? How would you feel if you couldn’t do it anymore?

Talk about two things for which you felt thankful or grateful for today.

Who is your favorite storybook character? What do you imagine he or she feels thankful for?

Actor Javier Bardem said, “I think we are living in selfish times...we live in the so-called ‘first world,’ and we may be first in a lot of things like technology, but we are behind in empathy.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain.

“Don’t judge a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes.” What does that phrase mean to you?

Choose your favorite book or movie character and explain how he or she feels. How does he or she show empathy?

What is your favorite thing to do outside?

Talk about a time when your adaptability or open-mindedness really helped you in a situation.

In general, do you think we as a society are more or less tolerant toward one another than we used to be? Why or why not?

What does ‘open-minded’ mean? Do you know someone who is open-minded?

“A person’s a person no matter how small...” writes Dr. Seuss in his classic book Horton Hears a Who. What do you think he means by that? (or if you own the book The Sneetches, read and discuss).

How do you think the way we demonstrate loyalty changes (or should change) as we get older?

When athletes change teams or people change jobs and go to work for a competitor, is that disloyal? Why or why not?

At this point in life, do you believe life is or isn’t fair?





Enjoy These Dinnertime Conversation Starters

What has made you feel this way?

We use lots of words every day that aren't in the dictionary. What's your favorite made up or slang word?

What is the greatest song ever written?

What is the best compliment you've ever received?

What is the one thing you couldn't live without?

Can you name the 7 wonders of the world? Do you agree with them? What would YOU say were the 7 wonders of the world?

How would you describe yourself to someone who has never met you?

Where in the world do you feel the most comfortable?

What is your favorite childhood memory?

Do you have a favorite piece of clothing? What makes it so special?

What one word would you use to describe yourself?

Did anyone read anything today in the newspaper or online that was surprising, upsetting or interesting?

Can you think of a time when you were responsible for doing something and didn't do it? What happened? How did the other people involved feel and how did you feel?

What was your favorite new story from this year?

What school subject do you think helps you the most in everyday life?

What's the most fun summer trip you've ever taken?

Lots of people picnic on public beaches and in public parks. Why do we have public spaces?

What's something you love to do and haven't done in a while because you were too busy?

Have you ever missed a chance to do the right thing because you were rushing too fast? What was it?

Can you give an example of a time you saw a friend, family member or stranger being treated unfairly? What did you do? (If you can't think of a real example, what might you do in such a situation?)

Think of a time life didn't work out how you expected. How did you respond? Would you respond differently now?

What are 3 things that you're good at doing that took a lot of hard work and practice?





Enjoy These Dinnertime Conversation Starters

What are some things you count on other people to do for you? What would happen if they stopped doing those things?

What was the most surprising thing that happened to you this year?

What was your favorite thing that you learned this year (either in school or outside of it)?

What subject are you taking that you wish you could do more of?

During what part of your day do you feel most anxious and rushed? How could we change that?

Where do you feel most relaxed?

What is your favorite piece of art?

What is your favorite snack food?

What is your favorite way to travel? (Bike, car, on foot, plane, train, etc)

How do you define fairness?

Do you think your name suits you?

What personality trait has gotten you into the most trouble?

If I asked your teacher what subject is your best, what would s/he say?

Tell a funny joke.

What is the most beautiful place you've ever seen?

If you could pack your own lunch every day, what would you pack?

If you did the grocery shopping, what would you buy?

If you could grow a mustache, would you do it? What would it look like?

How old do kids need to be before you think it's ok to have a Facebook account? Why?

What is your favorite animal?

How do you feel about bugs?

Would you rather be very tall or very short?

What is your favorite game to play with the family?

Do you think it's more fun to be a parent or a child?

What special talent(s) do you have?

What does your teacher do really well?





Enjoy These Dinnertime Conversation Starters

What is your favorite food? Your least favorite?

What is your favorite season? What do you like about it?

How do you feel about sharing? Do you like to share?
Why or why not?

How do daddy or mommy show fairness at home? Or
how does your teacher show fairness at school?

In the book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No
Good, Very Bad Day*, Alexander has a bad day. Have you
ever had a bad day? Did it get better? How?

What is one thing you enjoy being responsible for?

What are 3 things you have to do every day, whether
you like it or not?

What has been your favorite part of school this year?

What is your favorite part of the school day?

When you are really upset, what helps calm you down?

What is your favorite place in the world to sit quietly?

What is the craziest thing you've ever eaten?

What do you do each day to recharge after a long day?
Do you typically get to do this every day? Why or why
not?

Tell us a story about something that happened today at
school and another story that you made up about
something that happened. We'll try to guess which is
which.

What is one thing that happened today that made you
feel: happy, silly, friendly, smart? (Perhaps try a
different adjective each day.)

Which school subject do you think will be most helpful
to you in the future?

What is the hardest thing about being # years old?
What is the best thing about being # years old?

Would you rather be good looking, smart, or athletic?

Would you rather be rich or famous?

What is your favorite form of exercise?

What do you do when you are afraid?

What is your favorite type of weather?

What's your favorite thing to do outside?

A coach is fired after a video of him berating the
players goes public. Unfortunately, there are lots of
examples in the media of politicians, sports figures,
businessmen and others acting unfairly. Can you think
of someone you admired who acted unfairly? What did
they do? How did this change your opinion of them?





ACTIVITY

Kids Interview Parents

How often did you have dinner together as a family?

What was a favorite meal made in your family?

Who did most of the cooking, shopping, serving, cleaning up? How was that decided?

What did you talk about at dinner?

What was most fun about dinner time in your family?



The Family Dinner Project Placemats:

1. Print on standard 8.5 x 11 Paper. 2. Cut along orange cutlines. 3. Set them on the table and enjoy!

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Interview Your Family!

- 1 Talk about a time you stood up for someone else. What happened? How did you feel?
- 2 What is a trait of someone in your family that you admire and hope to have inherited?
- 3 If you could invite any historical figure, living or dead, to dinner, who would you choose? What would you serve? What would you want to ask them?
- 4 Tell a story of a time you learned something unexpected from someone else.
- 5 When people talk about you 100 years from now, what do you hope they will say about you?



The Family Dinner Project Placemats:

1. Print on standard 8.5 x 11 Paper. 2. Cut along orange cutlines. 3. Set them on the table and enjoy!

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Would You Rather?

- Would you rather eat only turkey or only mashed potatoes for an entire year?
- Would you rather celebrate Thanksgiving on the moon or on Mars?
- Would you rather be a pilgrim or a penguin?
- Would you rather say thanks or be thanked?

THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT.ORG



RECIPE FOR CONVERSATION

TALK ABOUT: CONNECTING WITH OTHERS



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What does it mean to you to feel connected to another person?

What are some things you can do in a conversation to show the other person that you're truly interested in listening to them?

What are some things others do to help you feel comfortable sharing and opening up to them in conversation? What are some things that others do that make you feel less comfortable sharing with them?

How are face to face conversations, phone calls, and text conversations different? Which do you prefer and why?

Are there certain types of conversations you'd rather have by text, vs. phone, or in person? Explain.

Who do you feel most comfortable talking to about difficult topics? Why?

Besides talking, what are some other ways you can feel connected with someone?



RECIPE FOR CONVERSATION

TALK ABOUT: ENVISIONING THE FUTURE



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If you could invent one thing to make the future a better place, what would it be and why?

What would the world be like if we could all live forever?

If you could travel to the future and see what happens in your life, would you? Why or why not?

What is one world problem you hope to see solved in the next 20 years?

What is one thing you can do now to work towards a big dream or goal for your future?





Facilitation Tips & Tricks



So, you've decided to facilitate a Community Dinner! Facilitating can be a bit intimidating at first, but these tips and tricks you'll find that facilitating is as easy as pie.

The Facilitator directs the events for the evening and should be somewhat comfortable presenting information and leading group conversations. You will also be involved in helping families get started with their family activities and making them feel welcome, building rapport and trust with the families present. Engaging in conversation and connecting with the families is key to making the facilitated discussion portion of the evening successful.

After dinner, your role as the Facilitator is to lead 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 experiences. Your goal is to set the stage for a dialogue about family dinner: 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.

TIP: We have found it super helpful to use a large whiteboard or easel with paper to document participants' responses throughout the discussion.

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. Family Dinner Project Programs that can help
 - A) Dinner Tonight
 - B) Food, Fun and Conversation (4 weeks to better family dinners)
 - C) Newsletter



“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 with families' 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 to help address some of their challenges. Be sure to document their comments!

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 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 of all the main challenges that arise.

Possible Conversation 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 TFDP 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 website and encourage families to check out The Family Dinner Project's other free online programs - Dinner Tonight

and Food, Fun and Conversation - as well as our blog, for tips 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 a Dinner Tonight card.



Follow-up Email Sample

THANK YOU!

Dear [insert name here],

Thank you for attending our recent Community Dinner event! We hope you enjoyed the time we spent together, along with the food, fun and conversation, and that you were able to take home some ideas to add a little spice to your family mealtimes.

It can take some effort to work new plans into everyday life, but we're here to support you in making family dinners happen more! Don't worry about trying to make it perfect or trying to do everything at once. Remember: just making a couple manageable changes can make a huge difference.

For more support and resources to make your family dinners the best they can be, connect with [Organization name] and The Family Dinner Project (TFDP) online! Connect with The Family Dinner Project online using the links below:

- Subscribe to their monthly newsletter;
- Get your free membership to "Dinner Tonight," TFDP's daily helping of food, fun and conversation with extra features and a personal dinner tracker;
- Sign up for the 4-week program to improve your mealtimes;
- Follow The Family Dinner Project on Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest;
- Contact us to find out how your family can be featured as a "Family of the Month!" on The Family Dinner Project's website.

We look forward to hearing how your family dinners go!

Happy food, fun and conversation,

[insert signature here]

[Name]

[Title]

[Organization]



BENEFITS 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.