



THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT OVERVIEW

Who we are

The Family Dinner Project (TFDP) 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. Our approach is designed to create authentic and meaningful engagement and bonding. We believe that conversation is as essential to family sustenance as good nutrition. In fact, families tell us just that—saying that when they share a meal, they feel closer to each other and want to return to the table again and again.

TFDP was founded in 2010 by a core team with a variety of personal and professional backgrounds, brought together by our shared belief in the power of family dinners. TFDP is a nonprofit initiative based at Massachusetts General Hospital's Psychiatry Academy. By supporting regular, substantive connection and conversation, TFDP works to improve the overall health and wellness of children and families.

Why family dinners

Decades of [scientific research](#) document the many physical, mental health, and academic benefits of family dinners. Research links regular family meals with the kinds of behaviors parents want for their children: healthier eating habits, of course, but also reduction of high-risk teenage behaviors such as drug use and teen pregnancy, lower rates of depression and anxiety, stronger resilience, and self-esteem, and even higher grade-point averages and better vocabularies. [Several recent studies](#) reveal that shared mealtime is also good for the physical and mental health of adults.

More than 90% of surveyed parents state that they want to have regular family dinners, yet [only 40-50% will eat together](#) on a given night. We aim to bridge this gap between what parents want for their families and the obstacles that commonly get in their way. Since 2010 when TFDP was founded, there have been over 4 million unique visitors to our website, another 250,000 families have participated in our events, workshops, and material distribution, and almost 80,000 people follow us on social media. We have also published a well-received book, *Eat, Laugh, Talk: The Family Dinner Playbook*.

What we do

TFDP designs online and community-based tools to support families to improve the frequency and quality of their meals together. We are the only organization with resources that focus on three key areas: food, fun, and conversation about things that matter. We carry out our work through several online and community-based programs. Included among our programs are digital materials to support daily habit change, community events and workshops. Additionally, TFDP has cultivated a large community via Facebook (almost 70,000 followers) that has enhanced our reach and ability to share

our materials and expertise with a broader audience. We are a national authority on family mealtime as evidenced by being interviewed and featured dozens of times in [national media](#), including The New York Times, The Washington Post, Time Magazine, NPR, The Wall Street Journal, AARP, LA Times, Parents Magazine, CNN, The Guardian, and many others. We have also reached thousands of health professionals, parents, and teachers through podcasts and talks at Grand Rounds, conferences, and schools.

How we create impact

To demonstrate our impact, we actively evaluate our programs and our tools. We are pleased to report that, to date, our programs and tools are improving family mealtimes in several ways. Survey results from families that participated in our 4-Week Program, Community Dinners, Parent Workshops, and Dinner in a Box programs indicate that 91% of families were positively satisfied with the programs and 97% projected making improvements to their mealtime practices. Families reported making the greatest gains in improving food preparation, reducing mealtime distraction, and engaging in more satisfying conversation.

Our collaborators:

The Family Dinner Project works with national and community organizations to reach and support more families to come together around the table for food, fun and conversation about things that matter. We work with partners through both online campaigns and in-person events. TFDP's programs are and have been supported through collaborations with The Hawks Foundation, the Tracy Family Foundation, Boston Market, No Kid Hungry, The Peter and Elizabeth Tower Foundation, the Poses Family Foundation, ButcherBox, and General Mills, among others.

COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS:

Community Dinners

TFDP supports schools, community-based organizations and neighborhoods to facilitate virtual and in-person [Community Dinners](#), an event that brings together different families in the same community, neighborhood, school, faith-based organization or any other setting, which is a powerful way to create a community of support for families who want to change their dinner habits. TFDP provides training and an organizer's toolkit with checklists, agendas, games, conversation starters, food preparation advice and answers to frequently asked questions; coaching to help organizers think through the opportunities and challenges of their event; and online access to all TFDP programming.

Parent/Caregiver Workshops

[These workshops](#) provide opportunities for parents to speak about dinner challenges and to share mealtime resources and wisdom while building community with other parents. TFDP trains partners to facilitate workshops with parenting groups across the country, helping participants understand research that links family dinners to positive child development; discuss the challenges of family dinners; share ideas to overcoming dinnertime challenges; and learn how to make the most of family conversations and how to make the dinner table a place for creative and bonding play.

Family Dinner in a Box

During the pandemic we began partnering with organizations who provided emergency food boxes to families who were struggling to feed their families. We provided recipes, games, and conversation starters to strengthen connection at the table. We have created [resources](#) for several organizations including the Idaho Office of Drug Policy, for three tribal communities in Montana, Adelante

Comunidad, Pete's Garden, The Salvation Army in Northern Illinois, Wellspring in MA, and MGH's Revere Clinic Food Pantry.

Community-Based Partners:

The Family Dinner Project could not have achieved a deep impact over the years without support from our community-based partners. We have worked nationally in 30 states with community partners that include Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Wellesley Health Department, No Kid Hungry, 92Y, YMCA select branches, Idaho Office of Drug Policy, Mayo Clinic, Military Child Education Coalition, United States Army Special Operatives, and the Atlanta Public School system. We have worked with 25 organizations in Western Illinois reaching thousands of families through our train-the-trainer program. Additionally, through webinars and sharing of our resources we have collaborated on [state-wide projects](#) at Purdue University's Center for Families and [city-wide as in Healthy Lynnfield](#), in MA.

ONLINE PROGRAMS:

Monthly Newsletter

Families can sign up for our [monthly newsletter](#), which includes easy and healthy recipes, strategies for defusing family tension and suggestions for transforming dinner table conversation into fun opportunities to learn and grow. Currently, TFDP's monthly newsletters reach over 26,000 parents, educators, community leaders and health professionals.

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. By the end of the month, families are planning more meals, cooking healthier food, and enjoying more quality time with their family.

Dinner Tonight

[This resource](#) is TFDP's newest program and provides participants with daily dinner inspiration and exclusive membership features. Members get an email every weekday with a recipe, suggested 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. To meet the needs of all families, TFDP also has [Dinner Tonight: Budget Friendly](#). This version of Dinner Tonight includes recipes that meet federal SNAP spending guidelines of \$2.10/person/meal. These materials—which include culturally relevant recipes, games and conversation starters— are also available in Spanish.

Online Partners:

TFDP's online partners have made it possible for us to reach more than 4 million people online since we were founded in 2010. Our digital partnerships include content collaborations and digital campaigns with Common Sense Media, Responsibility.org, Making Caring Common, The Kids Cook Monday, #GivingTuesday, The Harry Potter Alliance, Blue Star Families, This Star Won't Go Out Foundation, On the Table, and Pizza to the Polls.

Other Projects:

- Executive Director, Dr. Anne Fishel recently published an article which won the editor's

award from the American Psychological Association, “How Covid expanded the dinner table: Greater frequency linked with improved quality and new ways of eating together,” *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 2025.

- Working with mental health experts and with families, we developed a collection of new games, activities, videos, and blogposts-- [Welcoming Table](#) resources (developed to help children with sensory processing, behavioral, trauma, or feeding challenges derive the benefits of family meals) available on our website.
- We trained staff at the Middlesex Sheriff’s Office to implement TFDP programs and implemented an 8-week series of workshops for incarcerated women getting ready to transition out of prison. The program has been taken on by the staff and continues to be implemented.
- We are working with several organizations to offer our Dinner in a Box, partnering with food pantries and emergency food delivery services to include our resources that promote bonding and connection. We are training staff in several Western Illinois organizations, including schools, hospitals, and YMCA in building TFDP programs.
- The Family Dinner Project published a book in 2019—[Eat, Laugh, Talk: The Family Dinner Playbook](#) (Familius) that offers 52 weeks of easy recipes, games, and conversation starters to help families overcome the most common obstacles to family dinner, like too much tension at the table, not enough time, too busy schedules, and picky eaters. Each week features a family who we have worked with over many years. Dr. Anne Fishel published a book in 2015, [Home for Dinner: Mixing Food, Fun, and Conversation for a Happier Family and Healthier Kids](#) which weaves together her perspectives as a family therapist, working mother, and family dinner advocate.
- The Cooking Show for Health Professionals: This CME-approved 5-hour curriculum combines nutritional psychiatry with the research on the benefits of family dinners. In collaboration with Dr. Uma Naidoo, a professional chef and psychiatrist, Dr. Anne Fishel teamed up to provide a cooking demonstration and a community dinner held at the Boston Public Market where games and conversation starters are enacted by mental health professionals. The course also includes formal presentations on the science of shared mealtime and healthy eating that promote mental health for patients.

Interested in learning more? More information about our programs and resources can be found on our website: www.thefamilydinnerproject.org