

# Do-It-Yourself Neighborhood Dinners



The Family Dinner Project has been hosting community dinners at schools, community centers, and church halls for several years now. Families come together to cook, eat, play, talk and learn how to make family dinners a more consistent and meaningful part of their lives.

Someone always asks, “What’s next? Can we do this at our home, in our neighborhood?” The answer is yes, that is exactly what we want families to do—come together to support each other in this commitment and to make it fun and meaningful. Creating new habits is much easier when you have a community of friends all trying to do the same in their own homes.

We think of ourselves as a grassroots movement and we want the movement to spread house to house, community to community. We hope this Do-it-Yourself Community Dinner Guide helps make your home a hub of family dinner for your friends, and makes family dinners a cornerstone of your community.

## The Way This Works

The way this works is pretty simple:

- Find two other families with whom you would like to share some time, food and wisdom.
- Plan three dinners—one at each family’s house or, if space is an issue, the same house over the course of 4-6 weeks.
- Follow the program laid out here for each dinner, feeling free to modify it to your tastes, priorities and resources.
- Sign up for *Food, Fun and Conversation: 4 Weeks to Better Family Dinners* so that you can practice these ideas in your own home and make this a part of your family’s routine.
- Take photos, shoot video, gather stories, recipes and games from your house parties and send them along to FDP to post on the FDP Community Scrapbook.
- Have fun!

## What is in this Guide?

This guide addresses everything you need to host a dinner in your home in The Family Dinner Project way. What exactly does that mean? Well, here are the essentials:

## Essentials

We've boiled down all the parts to 5 essentials. Everything else is just icing on the cake!



We also have:

- proposed agendas for each night with possible menu ideas, games to play and things to talk about,
- a sample invitation,
- guidelines for sending us your pictures and stories,
- and feedback instructions so you can share how it went.

The most important thing to us is that you have fun, learn some new things that support your family, and build community. Here's to Food, Fun & Conversation!

--The Family Dinner Project

# DINNER AGENDAS

These little lists contain our suggestions for your dinner party. Check out recipes and descriptions in the Appendix. Of course, since this is YOUR party, you can modify however suits you!

## Dinner 1

**Theme:** Coming together

**Icebreaker:** What is your favorite family meal memory?

**Appetizer:** Make guacamole together, serve with chips.

**Dinner Prep:** Fajitas

**Toast:** Name one thing you are thankful for.

**Game:** Would You Rather...?  
Where in the World?

**Conversation:** Rose and Thorn

**Dessert:** Make chocolate pudding together.

**Coming together:** What are your goals for family dinners?

## Dinner 2

**Theme:** Trading secrets, sharing challenges

**Icebreaker:** Bring a recipe to swap with the other families.

**Appetizer:** Make veggie kabobs and dip together.

**Dinner Prep:** Pizza

**Toast:** Name one thing you are excited for this week.

**Game:** "Find Somebody Who..." Scavenger Hunt  
ABC Game

**Conversation:** Two Truths and a Tall Tale

**Dessert:** Make fruit and yogurt parfaits together.

**Trading secrets, sharing challenges:** What did you learn this week? What is getting in the way?

## Dinner 3

**Theme:** Celebrating your community

**Icebreaker:** Share an ingredient you love.

**Appetizer:** Assemble cheese and cracker masterpieces.

**Dinner Prep:** Everyone bring a soup or salad to share.  
Make salad dressing together.

**Toast:** What was your favorite memory from the neighborhood dinners or the four-week program?

**Game:** Higglety Pigglety  
Soup and salad tasting competition

**Conversation:** Dilemmas  
Imagination Conversation Starters

**Dessert:** Make ice cream sundaes together.

**Celebrating your community:** What's next?

# APPENDIX

Within the Appendix, you'll find a number of resources to help you put on your DIY Neighborhood Dinners.

Just like the agendas, the suggested resources are color coded: **Green** for Dinner 1, **Red** for Dinner 2 and **Orange** for Dinner 3.

We've covered all the bases from the Essentials listed on page 2, with a few extras and favorites thrown in for good measure. You can also find loads more games, recipes and conversation starters on our website, [www.TheFamilyDinnerProject.org](http://www.TheFamilyDinnerProject.org)

Of course, this is all about you. Whatever works best for you, go for it. And let us know how it goes! There is a special contact form on the last page of this packet that will give you all the details about submitting to our Online Scrapbook.

## Guacamole

**Prep Time:** 10 minutes

**Ingredients:**

3 Avocados, peeled, pitted & mashed  
1 Lime, juiced  
1 tsp. Salt  
½ cup Diced Onion  
3 Tblsp. Chopped Fresh Cilantro  
2 Roma or Plum Tomatoes, diced  
1 tsp. Minced Garlic  
1 pinch Ground Cayenne Pepper (optional)

**Instructions:**

In a medium bowl, combine and mash avocados, lime juice and salt. Mix in onion, cilantro, tomatoes and garlic. Stir in cayenne pepper, if using. Enjoy!

# APPETIZER RECIPES

Gather 'round, because these delicious dishes are designed to be made by large groups of people.

## Veggie Kabobs

**Prep Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Ingredients:** *(you can vary this, of course, to your liking)*

|                           |                 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Cherry tomatoes           | Sugar snap peas |
| Cucumbers                 | Cheese cubes    |
| Olives                    | Salami cubes    |
| Red/yellow/orange peppers | Cauliflower     |

**Instructions:**

This is a simple item for parents and kids to make together. First, make sure you have grilling skewers. Your kids, if old enough and with appropriate supervision, can cut the vegetables into cubes or disks. Only the cherry tomatoes should be served whole. Kids can also carefully (and again, with the close supervision of an adult for young children) place items on the skewers while mixing and matching colors to create a rainbow.

Finally, serve with hummus, ranch dressing, or all by themselves. Voila! You're done.

## Salad Dressing

**Prep Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Ingredients:**

**Basic Vinaigrette**  
1 cup Olive Oil  
¼ cup White Vinegar  
1 tsp. Garlic Powder  
1 tsp. Onion Powder  
1 tsp. Salt  
½ tsp. Black Pepper

**Dijon Dressing**

1 cup Vegetable Oil  
½ cup Cider Vinegar  
¾ tsp. Salt  
1 Tblsp. Dijon Mustard  
1 Tblsp. Grated Onion  
1 Tblsp. Sugar

**Instructions:**

Choose one, or all of the recipes! Put the ingredients in a medium bowl and whisk until combined. Serve immediately, or store in the refrigerator.

## Ranch Dressing

1 cup Mayonnaise  
¼ cup Buttermilk  
1 tsp. White Vinegar  
1 Garlic Clove, minced  
1 tsp. Fresh Dill, minced  
1/8 tsp. Sugar  
1/8 tsp. Salt  
1/8 tsp. Black Pepper

## Fajitas

**Prep Time:** 20 minutes

**Ingredients:** (serves 12)  
24 (8-inch) flour tortillas  
Vegetable oil  
3 Red Onions, thickly sliced  
6 Bell Peppers (red or green), seeded and sliced into strips  
1 Tbsp. Minced Garlic  
3 Yellow Squash, halved and sliced into strips  
1.5 cups salsa  
1 Tbsp. Cumin, ground  
1.5 tsp. Salt  
3 cups Shredded Cheese  
¾ cup Fresh Cilantro, chopped

**Instructions:**

Wrap the tortillas in foil and heat them in a 350 degree oven for about 15 mins. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add onions, peppers and garlic, stir to coat with oil. Cover, reduce heat to medium and cook for 5 mins. Stir in salsa, cumin and salt. Cover and cook for 5 more mins. Spoon vegetable mixture evenly down the centers of tortillas and sprinkle with cheese and cilantro. Roll up tortillas, and serve.

# DINNER RECIPES

Ask each guest to bring a veggie or a topping for Weeks 1 and 2, then have a potluck-style soup and salad night to finish the series!

## Pizza

**Prep Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Ingredients:** (serves 12)  
4 (12-inch) Pre-Made Pizza Crusts  
2 cups Marinara Sauce (1/2 cup per pizza)  
2 cups Part-Skim Mozzarella, shredded (1/2 cup per pizza)  
1 cup Parmesan Cheese (1/4 cup per pizza)

Other toppings (assume about ½ cup per pizza): Pepperoni, Peppers, Mushrooms, Olives, Pineapple, Broccoli

**Instructions:**

Preheat your oven to 450 degrees. Spread sauce onto your crust, then sprinkle cheese on top. Add whatever other toppings you like. Finish it off with a sprinkling of Parmesan, then bake until cheese is bubbly, about 10 minutes.

## Soup or Salad

This week, challenge your guests to bring their favorite soup or salad to dinner!

If you're up to it, you can even set up a "taste test" and have each guest vote for his or her favorite soup or salad.

**Some Soup Ideas:**

Black Bean Soup  
Lentil Soup  
Chicken Noodle Soup  
Tomato Soup

**Some Salad Ideas:**

Cobb Salad  
Spinach Salad  
Chicken Salad  
Egg Salad  
Potato Salad  
Coleslaw

These recipes all go really well with bread or rolls!

## Chocolate Pudding with Homemade Whipped Cream

**Prep Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Ingredients:**

Instant Pudding, prepared according to directions  
Whipping Cream  
Confectioner's sugar, to taste

**Instructions:**

Grab a shaker with a metal agitator ball—or a tightly lidded plastic container—fill it halfway with whipping cream and shake, shake, shake! Once the cream has reached whipped cream consistency, shake in 1 tablespoon of confectioner's sugar at a time, until it tastes just right. Dollop on top of the chocolate pudding or fruit and enjoy!

# DESSERT RECIPES

What's dinner without dessert?  
You might have your favorites  
(that's great! Send us the recipe!)  
but here are some of ours!

## Fruit and Yogurt Parfaits

**Prep Time:** 10 minutes

**Ingredients:**

Non-fat or Low-fat Vanilla Yogurt  
Granola  
Fresh or Frozen Berries (Strawberries, Blueberries, Raspberries and Blackberries all work—or a combination!)  
Honey (optional)

**Instructions:**

In small bowls or cups, layer yogurt, fruit and granola. Drizzle the top with honey, if desired. Easy peasy!

## Ice Cream Sundaes

**Prep Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Ingredients:**

Ice cream

**Some Topping Ideas:**

Chocolate Sauce or Hot Fudge  
Caramel or Peanut Butter Sauce  
Maraschino Cherries  
Sprinkles  
Cookie Crumbles  
Whipped Cream  
Gummy Candies  
Chocolate Chips

**Instructions:**

You probably know the drill. Grab a bowl or cup, scoop in some ice cream and top with anything that suits your fancy! If you want, you could make homemade whipped cream like you did at the first dinner!

# GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

**“Would You Rather...?”**: Take turns asking “Would you rather...?” questions. Once you play a few rounds, you can start making up your own as a family! A few ideas to start:

- ... own your own boat or your own plane?
- ...speak every language in the world or play every instrument?
- ... live in the future or in the past?
- ... be the best player on a losing team or the worst player on a winning team?
- ...live in the city or the country?
- ... walk the Great Wall of China or Amazon River?
- ... live without a telephone or a television?
- ...meet the president of the United States or your favorite movie star?
- ...be invisible or able to fly?
- ... sweat melted cheese or always smell skunk?
- ... be able to swim like a dolphin or run as fast as a cheetah?
- ...live in space or under the sea?
- ...have feet for hands or have hands for feet?
- ...have a head twice as big or half as small?
- ...be totally covered in hair head to toe, or be completely bald?
- ...shoot spaghetti out of your fingers or sneeze meatballs?
- ...always have to enter rooms backwards or always have to somersault out?
- ...always have the same song stuck in your head or always have the same dream at night?
- ...have a unicorn horn or a squirrel tail?

**“Where in the World?”**: Imagine everyone at the table has the gift of teleportation, but it only lasts for 24 hours. Where in the world would you go? Would you bring anyone with you? How long would you stay? What would you do there?

**ABC Game**: One family member starts the game by naming a **fruit or vegetable** that starts with the letter “A.” Then the next person names a person/thing that starts with the letter “B,” the next person finds something for the letter “C,” and so on.

Make it *extra challenging* by having each person first name all the fruits and veggies that came before. For example, if you’re up to C: “apple, banana, clementine” instead of just “clementine.” This may sound simple at first, but wait until you get to X, Y, and Z!



**Find Somebody Who...:** Print out a copy of the worksheet for every person at your dinner party. Whoever completes the sheet first (with as many different signatures as possible) gets first pick at dessert!

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| ...likes to bake<br><br>_____               | ...ate a banana today<br><br>_____                          | ...is a picky eater<br><br>_____                          |
| ...has a secret family recipe<br><br>_____  | ...cooks for the family<br><br>_____                        | ...likes to wash dishes<br><br>_____                      |
| ...enjoys the grocery store<br><br>_____    | ...owns a rice cooker<br><br>_____                          | ...has a weird favorite food<br><br>_____                 |
| ...goes to the Farmer's Market<br><br>_____ | ...knows a lot about food from another culture<br><br>_____ | ...eats dinner with his/her family regularly<br><br>_____ |

**Higglety Pigglety:** One person thinks of a rhyming pair of words, like Funny Bunny. Then the person gives clues which are synonyms for the two words- hilarious furry mammal. Additionally, the person clues everyone in to 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.

We know it can be difficult to come up with rhyming words, so here are a few of our favorites:

#### One syllable - Hig Pig

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| • Fun run      | Entertaining exercise                        |
| • Chip clip    | Fastener for a bag of snacks                 |
| • Blue’s clues | Hints from a colored dog                     |
| • Big dig      | Large excavation                             |
| • Small wall   | Tiny room dividers                           |
| • Bug mug      | An insect’s cup                              |
| • Long song    | Lengthy piece of music                       |
| • Lame game    | Boring activity                              |
| • Mouse house  | Home for a small rodent                      |
| • Goat boat    | Water transportation for a furry farm animal |
| • Stale mail   | Old, hard letters                            |
| • Cool tool    | Groovy device                                |

#### Two syllables - Higgy Piggy

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| • Lucky Ducky       | Fortunate water bird                    |
| • Yellow Jell-O     | Jiggly dessert the color of the sun     |
| • Stinky pinky      | Smelly small finger                     |
| • Ready Steady      | Prepared and not wobbly                 |
| • Hairy fairy       | Furry flying magical creature           |
| • Honey Bunny       | Sweet furry mammal                      |
| • Pencil stencil    | Erasable writing utensil guide/template |
| • Yummy mummy       | Delicious Egyptian corpse               |
| • Awful waffle      | Horrible breakfast food                 |
| • Orange door hinge | Fruity entrance pivot                   |

#### Three Syllables - Higglety Pigglety

- |                      |                                     |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Ignorant elephant  | Unaware large mammal with long nose |
| • Confetti spaghetti | Festive pasta                       |
| • Potato tornado     | Strong spud windstorm               |
| • Icicle bicycle     | Frozen transportation               |
| • Karate biscotti    | Fighting Italian dessert            |

For more games and activities, check out [thefamilydinnerproject.org/fun](http://thefamilydinnerproject.org/fun)

# CONVERSATION

**Rose and Thorn:** Ask everyone at the table to think about the “rose” (the best part) and the “thorn” (the most difficult part) of their days. Take turns sharing them with one another. This can be a great way to help kids open up about their day.

**Two Truths and a Tall Tale:** Have each family member think of two true facts about themselves, and one made-up fact (a “tall tale”). Go around the table and share your three items. The other family members have to guess which one isn’t true!

**Dilemmas:** Read each dilemma aloud and ask your kids if they think it's fair or not fair. If they say fair, they'll give a thumb's up and explain why. If they say not fair, they'll give a thumb's down and explain why not and how they might change the scenario to make it fair. This activity is not about conclusive answers, but is more an exercise to get kids thinking in the right direction.

You can brainstorm and write down a bunch of statements that could be interpreted as fair or not fair or use some of ours:

- You drink the rest of your friend's lemonade when she is not around without asking because you plan on making more for her later.
- You get help from your mom in doing your math homework, then get the best grade in your class and earn a prize.
- You play on the soccer team and because you are better than your teammates, the coach puts you in more.
- You and your little sister play with Legos but your sister cleans them all up.
- You invite your friend to your birthday party, but when he has a party and can only invite 3 friends you are not invited.
- You are going to a potluck dinner with about 20 other people and you bring a salad that could comfortably feed 15. Another guest brings a small yet intricate dessert only able to feed 4.
- Famous people frequently get away with illegal actions and face minimal consequences simply because they are public figures.

**Imagination Conversation Starters:** A well-worded question is a great way to connect at the dinner table. We call these starters because we imagine they will spark a deeper conversation about the things that matter to you.

- If you could choose another name for yourself, would you? What name would you choose?
- If you could have any zoo animal as a pet, what animal would you pick?
- If you were king or queen of the world, what would you do?
- If your pet could talk, what do you think s/he might say?
- Who is your favorite fictional character? Would you act the same way in his/her shoes?
- If you had to write a book, what would you write it about?
- If you joined the circus, what would your circus act be?
- If you assigned each emotion a color, what colors would represent which emotions?
- If you were a fruit, what fruit would you be? Why?
- If you could stay up all night, what would you do?
- If you wrote a newspaper article about your day, what would the headline be?
- If you could invent a machine to do something in your life what would that machine do?
- If you founded a new country, what would you call it?
- If you were a utensil, which would you be?
- If you did a self-portrait, what medium would you use (paint, clay, stone, pencil, etc.)?
- If you were ever involved in a protest, what would it be for?
- What would the title of your autobiography be?
- If you could be one age for the rest of your life, what age would you be?
- If you went back in time 100 years (or 200 years, or 1000 years) and could only bring three things with you, what would they be?
- In a movie about your life, who would play you? Who would play your family and your best friends?

For more conversation starters, check out [thefamilydinnerproject.org/conversation](http://thefamilydinnerproject.org/conversation)

# Food, Fun, and Conversation



## 4 weeks to better family dinners

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Whatever challenges you face, The Family Dinner Project's program *Food, Fun and Conversation: 4 Weeks to Better Family Dinners* offers help. Each week is centered on a different theme and has tools to help families reach their goals.

Introducing the program at your kick-off dinner is a great way for families to take the lessons home. After they've participated in the neighborhood dinner event, this innovative dinner program is a great next step.

### **Week 1: Make the Commitment**

In the first week, families figure out what their goals are for the rest of the program. It's up to the individual families to figure out what is working and what is not. This week is a chance for family members to sit down to any type of meal and discuss their goals for the program. We provide resources that help families set goals, have conversations and commit to making change.

### **Week 2: Make it Simple**

In the second week, we ask families to simplify dinner by making only two meaningful changes. The first is to choose something that is going well, and do more of it. The second is to choose something that isn't going well, and think of ways to get around that problem.

### **Week 3: Make it Fun**

The third week helps families have fun at the table. Some families use theme nights or invite guests to dinner. Others decide to play a silly game that keeps the family laughing. We offer ways to make dinner special and enjoyable.

### **Week 4: Make it Matter**

We hope that by the fourth week, families have created a safe space at the dinner table where they can talk about life lessons and other things that are important to them. It is through these deeper conversations that people grow, expectations shift and relationships flourish.

Maybe some things are going well and some things are more of a challenge – that's okay. Participating families have made the commitment to having dinners and are making an effort to talk and listen to each other. And after week 4, families can keep using the tools and resources from the plan, or create new games and conversation starters of their own. The possibilities are endless!

Get started at [www.thefamilydinnerproject.org/4week-program](http://www.thefamilydinnerproject.org/4week-program)

# INVITATION

I love the ease with which you can create and send invitations online. I created the invite below using [evite.com](http://evite.com). From there, just type in the email addresses of your guest list and hit send!



# SHARE YOUR STORY

We at The Family Dinner Project want to hear about all of the wonderful things you are doing at your own dinner table and during the Do It Yourself Neighborhood Dinners. We want to share your great ideas with other families

With this in mind, we created an online scrapbook and we want to feature your family. We ask that you copy and paste this easy form, fill it out and email it to [Grace@TheFamilyDinnerProject.org](mailto:Grace@TheFamilyDinnerProject.org)

Please include photographs of your dinner, and videos if you have any.

We ask that all pictures be attached to the email in JPEG form.

The scrapbook will be featured on our website. If you have questions, check out our website or email us!

1. Your name:
2. Description of your family (names, ages, relationship to you:
3. Did your family participate in the DIY Neighborhood Dinners?
  - a. If yes, who else came to your Neighborhood Dinner?
4. What did you make at this dinner?
5. Recipe:
6. What games did you play?
7. What did you talk about?
8. Additional comments:
9. Including (Note any that apply):
  - a. Video
  - b. Pictures