

RULES, RULES, RULES



Food

Try this favorite recipe from our Family of the Month!



Fun

Practicing dinnertime rules and manners is more fun when you play Restaurant!



Conversation

Speaking of rules...try this imaginative conversation starter!





“My dad doesn’t allow talking at the table. He says dinnertime is eating time, not chatting time!”

This comment from a 7-year-old dinner guest was a surprise, to say the least! The Family Dinner Project is all about food, fun and conversation about things that matter, so naturally, we tend to think that chatting is a big part of what makes dinnertime worthwhile. But our young friend’s declaration was a great reminder

that different families have different rules at the table, often for reasons we may not recognize right away.

Rules are great -- as we’re often reminding our less-than-enthusiastic kids, they keep order when it’s needed, help us to understand what is and is not expected of us and help provide a sense of security as they create structures around everyday activities. But sometimes rules can feel difficult to manage (or follow), and can pull the joy out of our family time.

Are your dinner rules making the table a more comfortable place for everyone to gather... or are they taking the fun out of family time? There’s no perfect formula for rule-setting, and everyone has to determine what works best at their own table. Check out our tips for successful rule-setting to help you get started.

MAKING MEALTIME RULE (INSTEAD OF RULING MEALTIME):

- **Be age-appropriate.** It’s not possible for most two-year-olds to sit still for a 20-minute meal, or for many 5-year-olds to cut their own food with fork and knife successfully and neatly. Start by gearing your tabletime rules towards age and developmental level.
- **Mind what matters.** Unless you’re eating dinner at Downton Abbey, it’s unlikely that perfect posture, knowing which fork is which or keeping elbows off the table are high priorities for the average family dinner. Decide what’s really important (chewing with mouths closed, or trying not to interrupt others) and build your expectations from there.
- **Go minimalist.** Fewer hard-and-fast rules means a greater chance of success, because family members will have less to remember, less to worry about...and that means more relaxation, fun and focusing on each other’s company. Stick to just a few rules at a time, and add new ones only when the original rules have become habit!
- **Be forgiving.** Eating is a learned skill all by itself. Eating socially -- while paying attention to manners, other people’s needs and conversational skills -- is a whole other complex thing to learn. Kids (and yes, even teens and young adults) will make mistakes. Don’t let those mistakes cause tension at the table, when a gentle reminder and a little patience can go a long way!

- **Get on the Same Page.** We all grow up with different rules and dinner rituals, so we often come to the table with different expectations from our spouses and partners. Make sure you communicate ahead of time about what your dinnertime rules will be, and how you'll manage them, to avoid unnecessary conflicts or confusion during the meal.
- **Think of goals, not rules.** Most things in life -- including family dinners -- are a work in progress. Decide what you want your family

meals to be like, keep that vision in mind and treat every mealtime as a small step on the path to accomplishing your goals. It's not the end of the world if everyone's napkins don't stay on their laps or somebody talks with their mouth full. You've got many more nights to try again!

READ MORE ON RULES AND DINNERTIME EXPECTATIONS:

thefamilydinnerproject.org/newsletter/rules-rules-rules

REAL FAMILY DINNER PROJECTS: THE DARVICK FAMILY



Meet the Darvick family! Faith and tradition were important foundations in the Darvick household as they raised their children, and now are coming full circle with the welcoming of a new generation. We're inspired by their story of making dinners together such a strong priority that it's now a tradition that keeps the whole family — grandparents, parents, and children — connected.

THE FAMILY:

Debra and Martin Darvick, of Birmingham, Michigan; their daughter Emma, of Brooklyn, NY; and son Elliot, his wife Elizabeth, and a new baby daughter, who hail from Huntington Woods, Michigan.

THE GOAL:

"We are a Jewish family," Debra shares, "and when the kids were little, we began having the traditional Friday night Sabbath dinner." The Darvicks began inviting friends to join them on Fridays, and eventually, "My daughter and her friends recalled Friday nights as one big party." Sharing the weekly meal with friends meant they could also share the workload — each family would contribute a potluck dish, and after the meal, everyone would stay for extra fun and conversation together. But when the kids grew up, the families stopped gathering as frequently. Mealtimes went back to the individual households.

“Now things are shifting again, and we’re back to gathering.” Debra says. “Not every week perhaps but definitely twice a month or so. So the goal would be to keep recapturing what we planted all those years ago.”

THE CHALLENGES:

When the Darvick kids were teens, the biggest challenge for Debra and Martin was making sure that they stuck with prioritizing their family dinners, despite the usual scheduling challenges that come with raising kids. Debra says she was determined that “high school activities were not going to be more important than this family tradition,” even though it sometimes meant she encountered resistance, especially from son Elliott. Still, the Darvicks persisted in making Friday night dinner the rule rather than the exception, allowing the kids to go out with friends later but not to skip the traditional family gathering.

“In high school we gave him five ‘get out of dinner’ passes, which he ended up rarely using. By junior year he confessed his gratitude for the dinners... our ‘strictness about these stupid dinners’ gave him a great out when his friends tried to sway him to challenge us.”

THE STRATEGIES:

Debra says that for her family, keeping dinners fun and special was the key. The Darvicks accomplished that goal by always inviting friends so that everyone at the table had someone special to be with. But she stresses that “fun” and “special” don’t have to mean that dinnertime is perfect — she learned along the way that it was best to relax and let things be casual. At the Friday night Shabbat dinners in the Darvick household, Debra recalls that the traditional blessings and candles were offered alongside potluck dishes. Conversations were steered towards what the kids were learning in school, and purposely kept away from distressing or irritating topics like taxes, politics or wars whenever possible. “The idea was to make it very special with extra good food, having company or going to friends’ houses.”

THE FOOD:

While the Darvicks’ Shabbat dinners were usually potluck-style to help share the burden among the families, there were some favorite recipes that have stayed on the menu and will now be shared with their new grandchild as she grows into family dinners. 40 Clove Garlic Chicken is one staple on Debra’s table.

THE TAKEAWAY:

Realizing how important family dinners were to her, her husband and children for so many years, Debra is now focusing on reclaiming the tradition and passing it on to the next generation. As her new granddaughter grows, Debra plans to share some of the conversation starters, ideas and resources from The Family Dinner Project with her son Elliott and his wife and help them incorporate them into a new Shabbat dinner tradition.

“We went to their house for the first Sabbath dinner after they brought the baby home from the hospital. I cannot tell you how wondrous it was to watch my son hold his daughter as he blessed her, and as he recited the blessing praising his wife. I realized that the tradition I began, somewhat shyly and uncertainly so many years before, was now gracing a third generation.”

THE BEST PART:

Debra says that for her, the best part of family dinners was “the deep feeling of connection to generations before me who made Sabbath dinner a priority and the idea that Jewish families across the world (not all but many) were doing much the same thing....The feeling that we were anchoring our kids to something beyond us all.” To other families who are now considering starting a family dinner routine, she says: “Do it! Whatever works for your family, set aside the phones and devices. Focus on one another. Modify how many teams the kids are on and how much you will allow those outside activities to shred family life.”



40 CLOVE GARLIC CHICKEN



This recipe is originally from Jane Brody's Good Food Book and was shared with us by the Darvick family.



Instructions:

1. Brush the chicken pieces on all sides with the oil.
2. In a large casserole or heavy Dutch oven, combine the onions, celery, parsley and tarragon. Lay the chicken pieces over the vegetables and herbs, and pour the vermouth over the chicken. Sprinkle the chicken with salt, pepper and nutmeg. Distribute the unpeeled garlic cloves throughout the casserole, tucking them under the chicken pieces. Cover the casserole tightly (you might fit a piece of foil around the top under the lid).
3. Bake the chicken in a preheated 325 degree oven for 1 1/2 hours. Do not uncover the casserole until this time has elapsed.
4. Serve the chicken with the garlic, advising the diners to squeeze the flesh from its papery coat. The garlic is especially tasty when eaten on crusty bread.

Ingredients

- 8 chicken legs and thighs, skinned and separated
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 large onion, coarsely chopped (1 cup)
- 4 ribs celery, sliced into 1/4-inch pieces (1 1/2 to 2 cups)
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley OR 2 teaspoons dried parsley flakes
- 1 teaspoon dried tarragon
- 1/2 cup dry vermouth
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, if desired
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- dash nutmeg
- 40 garlic cloves, separated but not peeled



RESTAURANT



Get the family together to imagine your favorite kind of restaurant, then bring it to life. Do you want to be a chef? Or maybe you're the customer. Take turns being the server, to keep things fair.

thefamilydinnerproject.org/fun/restaurant/



CONVERSATION STARTER



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