



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 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 »»



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.





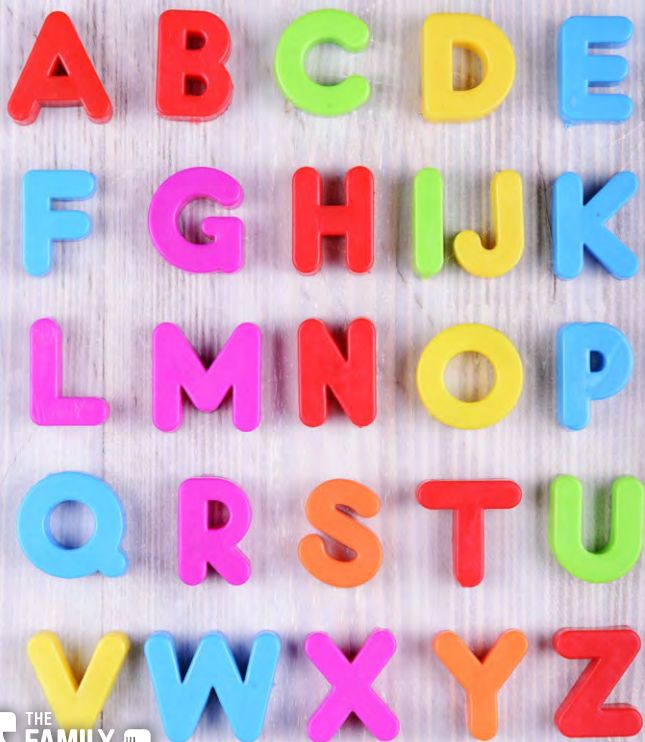
FUN



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?



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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.



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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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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?



RECIPE FOR CONVERSATION

TALK ABOUT: CONNECTING WITH OTHERS



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



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.



TFDP THEME DINNERS



BYTES & BITES:

A Community Dinner
Guide About Digital Life.



BYTES & BITES: A Community Dinner Guide About Digital Life



Looking for a way to bring families in your community together and have interesting, relevant conversations about social media and technology? Host a Community Media Dinner! Invite families to join an evening filled with adults and kids sharing perspectives, discussing hot topics, and learning more about each other's experiences.

Parents crave opportunities to have fun and engaging discussions with kids, especially when they're related to digital life. And kids are eager to share their opinions -- especially when adults ask relevant questions and convey genuine interest. Family dinner is a perfect time for these conversations. Plus, having an enjoyable and meaningful conversation over dinner is a great reminder of how valuable it is to sit down together.

Use this guide to bring a Community Media Dinner to your school. It's packed with field-tested activities and tips from Common Sense Education and the Family Dinner Project to ensure you have everything you need to make your event a success.

This handbook includes:

- An overview of the evening's flow and activities
- Logistics for hosting a Community Media Dinner, including information about planning and night-of events
- Field-tested content to use for the activities

OVERVIEW

Goals for the event:

- Engage families in important conversations about technology and social media
- Support families in their efforts to have more frequent and more engaging, fun family dinners
- Enjoy time together as a community
- Recognize the value of family meals

Summary of the evening:

1. Introduction (5 minutes):

- Welcome remarks

- *Rationale for family dinner as a time and place to talk about technology*

- *Overview of the evening*

2. Icebreaker (10 minutes): Low- and/or high-tech
3. Appetizer (20 minutes): Making the food and Post-it activity
4. Dinner (30 minutes): Eating while discussing technology dilemmas
5. Closing comments and future plans: (10 minutes)
6. Dessert and mingling: (15 minutes)



LOGISTICS

Step 1: Schedule

- Work with school administrators and teachers to plan your Community Media Dinner.
- Find dates and times that work well for other parents. If this is the first event you're hosting, you can check with a teacher, administrator, or current/former Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) coordinators about which days and times get the highest family attendance.
- As we've designed it, the event lasts about 90 minutes, though we recommend you plan for two hours. (People may arrive a bit late, so you may start a bit later than anticipated, and transition times between activities can take longer than expected.) Decide whether you want to include more time for mingling and casual conversation and how you want to modify the proposed timing and activities.

HINT: You'll want to avoid nights with big community events.

It also may be helpful to recruit a teacher or a few older siblings who aren't participating to stay during the event and watch younger children (depending on the age of student you want to engage), since some parents may want to come but need childcare in the evenings. It's also helpful to avoid busy times of year, such as the start of school and times close to the winter holidays.



Step 2: Plan

- Find a space to hold the event. Take stock of the available options and try to find a place where people will be able to comfortably sit and eat while they talk (cafeterias are usually a good option). Try to choose a space where you can spread tables out enough that conversations aren't happening on top of each other. Determine how many people you can comfortably seat.
- Depending on the number of participants you can accommodate, the size of your school, and the turnout you expect, decide whether you want to invite families from one particular class, a specific grade, or a band of grades (e.g., 6th- to 8th-grade families).
- Plan for an easy, crowd-pleasing meal. We recommend trying either a taco bar or a pasta dinner. In both cases, you can start with a simple appetizer that people prep and eat at the table (guacamole, salsa, and chips work well before tacos, or try a simple salad with optional add-ins as a starter for pasta). Cake, brownies, or cookies make for a fun and easy dessert. (If resources don't allow for an ordered-in dinner or for food prepared by the school's cafeteria team, consider trying a potluck so you can keep the feel of a family meal).
- Find a few volunteers, other parents or teachers, to help with setup and cleanup.
- Decide which dilemmas you want to use for the dinner discussion. Try to pick topics you think will resonate with families in your community. Tables will discuss different numbers of dilemmas (some might get through only one, whereas others might get through four) depending on the flow of their conversations and the amount of time you provide. Make sure to give participants more content than you think they need; we recommend preparing packets with five to seven dilemmas. Check in with a teacher or another parent to get a second opinion on the topics.

HINT: Don't forget that you'll need plates, cutlery, napkins, and cups, as well as utensils for serving.





Step 3: Invite

Get the word out! Copy, paste, and tweak the following message for an email or newsletter:

Community Media Dinner and Digital Media Conversation
On [Date] at [Time]

Unsure what questions to ask about Instagram? Confused about digital footprints? Curious how your kids think about privacy and Internet safety? Please join us for a Community Media Dinner and cross-generational conversation about technology and social media! We'll do some cooking, do some chatting, and enjoy a meal together.

Please RSVP to [email address]. Participation is free, but space is limited.

Step 4: Recruit facilitators

- Once you have a sense of how many people are coming, you can determine how many tables you will fill. If your space and tables allow it, we recommend six to eight people per table and having both parents and kids at each table. You'll want to recruit at least one parent facilitator per table. Facilitators will help with the digital-dilemma discussion portion of the evening.
- One of the best ways to ensure that the evening runs smoothly is to make sure facilitators are prepared to keep their tables on track and guide conversation. Two ways you can help facilitators get ready are: 1). share our Facilitator's One-Pager ahead of time to give them a sense of what to expect, and 2). schedule a training call (you can do this using a dial-in conference line or over Google Hangouts) to provide an overview of the plan for the evening and discuss any questions.

Step 5: Prep

- If you plan to show the "Oversharing" video during the introduction, make sure you have a projector and sound system so people can see and hear the video from their seats.
- Gather supplies for the appetizer activity. You'll want at least two sheets of giant Post-its, plus regular-size Post-its and pens or markers. Write "What we want our parents to know ... " at the top of one and "What we want our kids to know ... " at the top of the other.
- Print out digital-dilemma packets for the dinner discussion, and make sure you have enough copies so every participant (child and adult) has his or her own. Place the packets in the middle of each table before everyone arrives.
- Confirm the food plan, including where you'll set up the buffet. Make sure you have plates, cups, napkins, and utensils, plus anything you need for serving.
- Select the resources you want to make available as take-home materials, and print copies to distribute at the end of the night.
- Double-check the RSVP list to make sure you have enough food, facilitators, and seats.

Step 6: Host

Welcome everyone to the event! Encourage adults to sit with their kids but also with at least one other adult/kid combination at their tables; you want families to stick together but also take advantage of the opportunity for a slightly different dynamic and the benefit of some outside perspectives. Ask facilitators to spread themselves out so they're sitting one per table.

Explain that the evening is divided into four main parts: an **introduction**, an **appetizer activity**, the **dinner discussion**, and a casual **dessert** with time for mingling.





INTRODUCTION:

Once people are seated at their tables, give them an overview of the evening, ask facilitators at each table to identify themselves, and get started with an icebreaker. We have two icebreaker options, a high-tech version and a low-tech version. Review both in the field-tested content section below and choose the one that makes most sense for your group

HINT: In your introduction, include reasons why dinner is a great time to talk about technology and to have other meaningful conversations. You can acknowledge the irony that dinner is often one of the few times of the day when most families turn off gadgets.

APPETIZER ACTIVITY:

Ask adults and kids to form separate groups. Put the Post-it notes you prepared on the wall so the adults have the “What we want our kids to know ... “ version and vice versa. Invite everyone to jot on the Post-it notes any thoughts or ideas about what they want the other group to know, remember, or understand related to technology and social media. Give the groups about 15 minutes for this activity.

HINT: It’s helpful to have one facilitator with each group to keep everyone on task. Also, if you have a large group, you may want to consider breaking it up into several

adults-only and kids-only groups. Aim for each group to be no bigger than 15. Remember, if you’re going to split up into a series of smaller groups, each group should have a giant Post-it to stick their responses on.

While everyone is working on the brainstorm, have them also dive into making the appetizer. Depending on what you think will work best for your group, you can have the appetizers already set up on the tables or you can have people do the prep while they’re brainstorming (e.g., you can chop ingredients for the guacamole or salad ahead of time and put them on the tables, then invite people to mash/mix/toss while they eat, or you can have the appetizers on the tables ready to be eaten).

DINNER DISCUSSION:

Have the adults and kids return to their original tables. Start by telling everyone the food plan (if you have dinner set up as a buffet, you may want to tell tables you will invite them to go up one at a time). Next, explain that the digital dilemmas are designed to facilitate conversation, and they can be used in whatever way each table wants. Note that the dilemmas are all based on real kids’ stories. Each table should feel free to skip around, change the order, or deviate from the questions. Remind everyone that there are no right or wrong answers and

this is really an opportunity to learn and share. Give the groups about 40 minutes for this portion of the evening.

HINT: It can be helpful to provide some guidelines for having a conversation when there may be different points of view. For example, everyone gets a turn to talk with equal time. Suggest that people be curious rather than critical.

DESSERT:

Invite everyone to think about what they might add to the giant Post-its following their dinner conversations. Make sure the regular Post-its are available, and encourage people to add to their group’s original brainstorm during dessert. Let everyone know they can use dessert time to mingle and connect with others as well as do a “gallery walk” and check out the other groups’ Post-its (have participants add Post-its of a different color so everyone can see which ideas are new).

- If you’ve prepared any take-home resources, encourage families to pick them up before they leave.
- Say thank you, share any next steps or resources, and give families a chance to share feedback about the evening, whether in person or with a note.

Step 7: Follow up

After the event, follow up with all the adults by email. If you’re able to snap a picture of each of the giant Post-its at the end of the evening, consider sending it with your email. This is a great opportunity to say thanks again for their participation and to capitalize on the momentum of the evening to keep the conversation going. Check out our [Conversation Cases and Teen Panel Guide](#) for other events to bring to your community next!



FIELD-TESTED CONTENT



INTRODUCTION

Option 1 (high-tech):

Play the “Oversharing” video. After watching together, ask everyone at each table to name the type of online oversharing that surprises him or her most. VIDEO: (<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/videos/oversharing-think-before-you-post>). Made in collaboration with our partner Flocabulary, the experts in educational hip-hop, this animated music video raps about the hazards of oversharing online and emphasizes a thoughtful approach to digital footprints. Tweens, teens, and adults can laugh and learn about the ups and downs of communicating and connecting in the digital world.

Option 2 (low-tech):

The event is all about media and family, so warm up by having everyone at each table share his or her favorite dinner scene or food moment from a movie.

Option 3:

Depending on your timing, there may be time for both icebreakers. Option 2 only takes five minutes, so it's possible to start with it to get folks engaged and then jump into the video.

APPETIZER ACTIVITY

See description in the *Logistics: Host* section (above) for details.

DINNER DISCUSSION

We've included eight of our digital dilemmas here. Pick five to seven that you think will resonate most with your community.



DIGITAL DILEMMAS

All available online at www.common sense media.org/educators/connecting-families/share



DILEMMA A: DISTRACTED

Every night, Cruz gets home from school and starts doing his homework. Most of his homework is on the computer, so he often has multiple windows open and will occasionally check back and forth between an assignment and different websites. Sometimes he even finds social media helpful, because he can chat a friend from class to get help. Cruz's mom told him she doesn't want him using the Internet while he does his homework because she feels like he gets too distracted, but Cruz told her he actually can't do his homework assignments without it. Plus, he's getting his homework done and he's doing well in the class—so who cares if it takes a little longer because he gets distracted once in a while?



- What's your gut reaction to this story?
- How do you find technology helpful for learning?
- Do you ever find yourself distracted by social media or your cell phone when you're trying to focus on work? What do you do when that happens?
- What do you think of Cruz's argument that it shouldn't matter how long his homework takes so long as he's doing well in the class? Are there any issues with his logic?
- What advice would you give to Cruz's mom?



DILEMMA B: IT'S NOT EVEN MY POST!

Melissa was allowed to get social media accounts on one condition: She had to give her dad the passwords so he could log on to her accounts. Melissa didn't mind the rule because she never posted anything inappropriate, and it seemed to help him chill out about the whole thing. The only problem was that Melissa couldn't control what her friends were posting, and her dad would hold it against her whenever her friends shared anything questionable. Melissa tried to tell her dad that she agreed some pictures and comments were inappropriate, but he didn't seem to understand. First he asked her to unfollow one of her best friends. "That's not an option!" she said. Now he was even saying he didn't want her to sleep over at one girl's house because of a picture she posted a few weeks ago.



- What is your gut reaction to this story?
- What seems realistic (or unrealistic)?
- What kind of content do you think Melissa's dad would have been concerned about? Is there a difference between what kids think is inappropriate and what adults think is inappropriate?
- Why do you think Melissa's dad wanted her passwords instead of simply following her?
- Kids, if you were a parent, what strategies would you use to try to keep your kids safe with technology, cell phones, and social media?
- What advice would you give Melissa? What would you do if you were in Melissa's situation?



DILEMMA C: EDITING AWAY

Tali knew exactly which day of the week and what time of day she should upload a picture to maximize the number of likes she received (Sunday night, it turned out, was golden). She

had mastered the most flattering pose and knew the best filters to perfect her look. In reality, she put a lot of thought into each picture she uploaded, even though she had it down to such a science it seemed effortless. If she didn't get at least 11 likes within the first hour of uploading a picture, she would almost always delete it. At lunch one day, Tali's friend told her about a new app that let you edit your pictures to make you look skinnier. The app could make you look like you were five, 10, or 20 pounds skinnier with a quick tap. Her friend was planning on using it, but Tali told her that was weird. "You edit your pictures all the time!" her friend responded.



- What is your gut reaction to this story?
- What do you think of Tali's approach to uploading pictures, knowing just how to pose and when to post a picture and even taking a picture down if it didn't get enough likes?
- How would you explain "likes" to someone who has never used social media? Are they important, and if so, why?
- What do you think about the idea of an app to make you look skinnier? How is this similar to or different from using other types of editing tools (such as filters)?
- Do you think using a skinny editing app would be more likely to help or hurt the user? Why? would you do it if you were in Melissa's situation?



DILEMMA D: TAKE IT DOWN!

When Vin Snapchatted his friend an embarrassing picture of himself, he hadn't expected him to take a screenshot and upload it to Facebook. He didn't want to seem uptight, but he was pretty

embarrassed that the picture was posted for all to see. He texted his friend, "Not cool, man. Take it down." His screen lit up: "hahahah." Vin texted back, "Nah, I'm not playing, take it off." His friend wrote back, "Whoa, chill out, I'm just playing," but he didn't take the picture down. Vin was about to go through recruiting for college sports, and though he knew the picture wouldn't get him in trouble, it wasn't exactly the image he wanted recruiters to see.

- What is your gut reaction to this story?



- Is it reasonable for Vin to be concerned about the recruiters? What kinds of content do you think the recruiters would or wouldn't want to see if they searched for Vin online?
- Why do you think Vin's friend took a screenshot?
- Are there any pictures you wouldn't mind sharing now but wouldn't want attached to your name later in life?
- Have you ever asked anyone not to post a picture of you or to take down a picture of you? Has anyone ever asked you to take down a picture?



DILEMMA E: FAKE PAGES

Mackayla looked away from her computer screen in disbelief. One of her friends had just sent Mackayla the link to a vicious fake page ... of Mackayla's younger sister, Remy. Someone—she had no idea

who was behind it—had used Remy's picture and name to make a fake account. The person had filled out all the "About me" sections, making fun of Remy's interests, hobbies, and even her style and appearance. All the tagged pictures were Photoshopped, with Remy's head on embarrassing bodies. One picture showed Remy's face on the body of a very overweight older man, and another had Remy's head on the body of a nearly naked bikini model. Even worse, it looked like the fake page had "friended" more than half of Remy's grade. Mackayla remembered that Remy had mentioned having some issues at school and had even come home crying a couple of times, but she hadn't realized it had gotten this bad. Mackayla didn't



- know if Remy had seen the page yet, but she was devastated and knew Remy would be too.
- What is your gut reaction to this story?
- Do you think this is a case of cyberbullying? Why, or why not?
- Have you ever heard about this kind of thing happening? Have you ever heard about similar cases like this?
- What would you do if you were Remy's older sister and you saw the page?
- What can different people—Remy's parents, her school, her friends—do to help Remy get through this experience?



DILEMMA F: BREAKING AND ENTERING

Nik and his girlfriend, Blair, were hanging out at his house. Blair got up to go to the bathroom and left her phone on the couch. While she was gone, Nik noticed her phone light up and saw the name “Matthew” out of the corner of his eye. He was torn about whether or not to look but decided he would just take a quick look at the texts on the main screen. Then he couldn’t resist: He knew Blair’s phone password, so he typed it and opened the conversation. Before he knew it, he was scrolling through Blair’s conversations. He saw that she had been texting Matthew a lot. Nik was furious, but he couldn’t decide whether or not to confront Blair and admit he had looked at her text messages. Finally, he decided he was too angry to ignore it. Blair could not believe Nik had looked through her messages. She thought he trusted her and felt like this was a complete invasion of her privacy.



- What is your gut reaction to this story?
- Can you understand Nik’s decision to read Blair’s text messages? Has there ever been a situation when you wanted to read someone’s messages?
- What do you think about Blair’s reaction? Did she have a right to be angry?
- Are there any situations when it’s OK to read another person’s private messages or emails?
- Are you surprised that Nik had the password for Blair’s phone? Do people you know ever share passwords (for example, with friends, significant others, or family members)?



DILEMMA G: FOR ALL TO SEE

Tisa’s aunt requested to be her friend on Facebook. Tisa didn’t really have anything to hide, so she decided to accept the friend request. A few days later, Tisa got a notification that her aunt had posted on her wall. When she read the post, she immediately realized her aunt didn’t understand the difference between posting on someone’s wall and sending a message to an inbox. She cringed as she read the message: “Hi Tisa! Your mom told me that you and your friend are in a fight because you both like the same boy. This has happened to me before too and I know the feeling. Hang in there... I love you!”



- What is your gut reaction to the story?
- How do you relate to Tisa’s experience?
- What would you do if you were Tisa?
- What are the benefits of kids being friends with adults on social media? Are there any drawbacks?
- Kids, how do you decide whether you’re going to accept a follow or friend request from an adult in your life? Parents, how do you decide whether you’re going to accept a follow or friend request from a kid other than your own?



DILEMMA H: YOU’RE SMOTHERING ME

Tadashi really liked his new boyfriend, Max, and he couldn’t stop thinking about him. He loved that he could stay in touch with him all the time by texting. Max was crazy about Tadashi, too, and he really liked getting his text messages. The only problem was the quantity: Tadashi was sending Max messages nonstop. If Max didn’t respond right away, Tadashi would keep texting him to make sure everything was OK. First, he would send a row of question marks, then “hello??” and then “are you mad at me?” Max tried to tell Tadashi that the texting was too much, but Tadashi got defensive and said that if he felt that way maybe they should just stop texting altogether. Max didn’t know what to do—he liked Tadashi, but even other people in his life were starting to comment on how much Tadashi texted him.



- What’s your gut reaction to this story?
- What would you do if someone was texting you too much? Have you ever been in a situation like this?
- What advice would you give Max in this situation?
- Have you ever gotten the sense that someone else felt like you were texting him or her too much? How did you manage that situation?
- Do you ever take breaks from using your cell phone and checking your messages/social media? Why, or why not?

Common Sense rates, educates, and advocates for kids, families, and schools:

- For more school-related resources, please visit www.commonsense.org/educators
- For more parent-facing resources, please visit www.commonsense.org

The Family Dinner Project provides resources and tools around food, fun and conversation about things that matter to help families improve the quality of their shared meals. For more inspiration on making meaningful connections at the dinner table, visit www.thefamilydinnerproject.org



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Benjamin Franklin Circles and
The Family Dinner Project Toolkit

Benjamin Franklin Circles and The Family Dinner Project Toolkit

WELCOME!

In our increasingly digital world, many say that they find it harder than ever before to know their neighbors and feel connected to their community. In addition to serving as a space for individual self-improvement, Benjamin Franklin Circles have the power to bring communities together for meaningful, offline interactions to build community and better our world.

The Family Dinner Project is a growing movement all about food, fun and conversation about things that matter. Studies show that the simple act of sharing a meal helps to build confident, caring and connected children and families. Friends, neighbors, and other communities can also find connection by sharing meals together. Through our Community Dinner Program, we support individuals and families as they learn from each other's challenges and successes. By participating in a community dinner, individual families feel inspired to jumpstart their own commitments to nightly dinners, as they feel part of something bigger than themselves.



Why not combine these two great initiatives, and bring communities together for meaningful, enjoyable interactions over food?

Below is a series of guidelines that combine our varied experiences. Just as every individual is different, every community is different, so use this as a guide to figure out what will work best for you and your members. These are not rules, but a framework. Make your club your own. And share what you have seen work best. We will all improve faster by learning from each other.



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Benjamin Franklin Circles and
The Family Dinner Project Toolkit

What are Benjamin Franklin Circles?

Benjamin Franklin, the godfather of self-improvement, created what he called a “Mutual Improvement Club” in 1727, which met every Friday for 40 years. The idea behind the club was to bring together individuals with diverse interests and skills to work towards improving themselves and their community.

The foundation of the club was 13 virtues: Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility, Chastity and Humility. In Franklin’s autobiography he included a framework and specific guidelines for how he created his club so that those who came after him could follow his example.

Almost 300 years later, [we are using Franklin’s virtues](#) as a launching off point to re-imagine community engagement, leadership and values for the 21 st century , and examine how our interpretations of them can improve our lives and the world we live in.



What is The Family Dinner Project?

The Family Dinner Project is a movement that champions family dinner as an opportunity for families and individuals to connect with each other through easy, healthy recipes, games to play at the table and ideas to spark meaningful conversation.

Years 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, binge-drinking and teen pregnancy, as well as lower rates of depression and anxiety. It’s not just that mealtimes prevent high risk behaviors; they also promote positive ones like resilience and self-esteem, as well as providing key benefits to the brain. Having regular family dinner is a better predictor of



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high achievement than doing homework or playing sports. It's also just plain fun: teenagers consistently rank dinner with their families as one of their most enjoyed activities.

While this research is the “why” of family dinners, The Family Dinner Project is the “how.” Through our online resources and our work in communities, we help families unlock all of the many benefits of shared meals and make them their own.

Benjamin Franklin Circles and FDP Community Dinners are:

- Recurring
- Face-to-face
- Events that bring communities together
- Free

Our goals are to:

- Encourage civic engagement
- Spark deep conversations around big questions
- Inspire a sense of purpose in improving our community and ourselves
- Form deep connections among the group and beyond
- Build habits that individuals will bring home to their families and that will last a lifetime

Benjamin Franklin Dinner Circles Format

Our Benjamin Franklin Circle meets monthly to focus on one of Franklin's 13 virtues (outlined below). Each meeting is two hours long, and is divided into three sections: “appetizer,” “entrée” and “dessert.”

Sharing food while sharing conversation deepens the connections club members might otherwise make. Participants have the opportunity to learn more about one another through sharing recipes and stories; they're able to learn from one another as Circle members share cooking tips and techniques; and they're unified in their experiences through the multi-sensory exploration and enjoyment that come naturally through sharing a meal.

On the practical side, sharing food during meetings of the Circle can make attendance much more possible for some members, who might not otherwise have an opportunity to eat if not served a meal during the meeting.

We suggest that the group work together to establish a plan for food preparation each month. Some options include potluck, rotating responsibilities, and cooking together.



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Appetizer:

We spend the first 40 minutes with an appetizer: diving into our experience of the previous month's virtue, while sharing some light food together. Some easy, fun appetizer ideas include [hummus](#) and pita, cheese and crackers, guacamole and chips, vegetables and [dip](#).



Entrée:

During the second 40 minutes we connect over an entrée. In an effort to save time for discussion, we advise preparing this course ahead of time, but serving it “family style” – inviting individuals to pass around bowls of different elements (a salad, a starch, a protein) and serving one another. During this time, we discuss how Franklin defined the next month's virtue and how we plan on committing to it. Members choose a commitment that is specific, realistic and measurable so that they can track whether they improved in their practice for each month. When the group meets monthly every member will have an opportunity to share his or her experience.

Following Franklin's model, the meetings will each focus on one of Franklin's 13 virtues, as defined by Franklin himself:

- **Temperance:** Eat not to dullness. Drink not to elevation.
- **Silence:** Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself. Avoid trifling conversation.
- **Order:** Let all your things have their places. Let each part of your business have its time.
- **Resolution:** Resolve to perform what you ought. Perform without fail what you resolve.
- **Frugality:** Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
- **Industry:** Lose no time. Be always employed in something useful. Cut off all unnecessary actions.
- **Sincerity:** Use no hurtful deceit. Think innocently and justly; and if you speak, speak accordingly.
- **Justice:** Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.



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- **Moderation:** Avoid extremes. Forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
 - **Cleanliness:** Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes or habitation.
 - **Tranquility:** Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or avoidable.
 - **Chastity:** Rarely use venery but for health or offspring; never to dullness, weakness, or to the injury to your own or another's peace or reputation.
 - **Humility:** Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

Discussion topics include:

- How can this virtue be interpreted for our modern lives?
- How can we extrapolate from what we've learned in a way that is applicable to our local and global community?
- How can we, or our larger networks, collaborate and apply learnings to promote the common good?

Dessert:

The final 40 minutes of the group are devoted to dessert. This course could be as simple as coffee or [fruit](#), or something more involved like a cheese course, a cake or a pie. Let the tastes of the group determine the plans, and vary the menu from one month to another.

These final 40 minutes are focused on a set of questions that Franklin and his cohort asked one another at each meeting:

- What is something you're looking for help on? Something you're struggling with?
- Is there anyone in the group starting a new business or venture (or project)?
- How can we help you? Even if it's just to "like" you on Facebook or retweet you, we want to leverage the power of this network.
- Do you know of anyone who is not here who deserves praise? (We interpret this to mean: Is there anyone we know doing innovative things that others in this group should know about.)
- Is there any man whose friendship we want? (We interpret this question to mean: How could we leverage our network to help each other, man or woman?)
- Is there any advice we can give each other about our work/personal life?
- Do you know of any deserving young beginner lately set up, whom it lies in the power of the club in any way to encourage? (We interpret this to mean: Do you know anyone we can help/mentor, i.e., paying it forward?)
- Do you see anything amiss in the present customs or proceedings of the club, which might be amended? (We interpret this to mean: How can this group continue to improve?)



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How do I launch my own Benjamin Franklin Dinner Circle?

There are many ways to launch a successful circle, so we encourage you to experiment. Try creating your own set of thirteen virtues. Gratitude, acceptance of difference, empathy? Let the virtues help to determine the menu; for example, when discussing frugality, your menu could be made up entirely of items already in your pantry, or by reusing leftovers.



Try asking a different set of questions. For example, how do your dinner habits impact your other habits? What are ways that you want to teach or model this virtue in your family? Are there social forces at work that are interfering with your children learning this virtue, and how might you counteract those forces? If we were to discuss this virtue in a different community, might there be differences based on culture, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, age or class? Meet weekly instead of monthly. There is no one way to launch a Benjamin Franklin Dinner Circle. As long as members are improving you are doing it the right way!

Here are some steps to get you started:

- **Announce you are starting a circle:** Send an email out to those in your network who may be interested in joining or post an announcement on your social media channels like Twitter and Facebook. You can also create a group on [Meetup](#) or, if you prefer to go the non-digital route, post an announcement on the bulletin board at your local café.
- **Find a location:** This is your first goal. You can meet in someone's living room or a community center, library or café. Somewhere quiet is preferable. We have found it works best if you can stick to the same space for each meeting.
- **Welcome:** Once you know who will be joining your circle and where it will be held, send a welcome letter to all new members [sharing](#) the one-page history and background document we created, which includes descriptions of the virtues and the questions that you will be asking at each meeting, and outlining why you have decided to launch your own circle. This letter should also clarify the commitment you expect from each member and include a short bio for each of the members. Feel free to create your own letter or use the template we created and edit for your own needs. We think groups of 8-12 work best because it keeps the group intimate and the conversation flowing.



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- **Pick a date:** Send out a calendar invite by email. Include the virtue you will be focused on for that month and the set of questions in the invitation so all members can be prepared prior to arriving for the meeting. We sent out all 13 calendar invites when we launched our circle.
 - **Potluck by course:** Ask everyone to bring food or drink to share with the group.
 - **Don't go it alone:** Co-leaders are recommended to help share the responsibility.

How should I structure our first meeting?

- **Introductions:** The night of the first circle meeting spend the initial 40 minutes introducing everyone. We like to ask everyone to share their name, what they do or what they're passionate about, and one fun fact about themselves. Feel free to use any icebreaker that gets everyone in the room sharing.
- **Set the structure:** Briefly discuss why Franklin decided to launch his Benjamin Franklin Circle and the 13 virtues that form the foundation of the circle. We decided to stick to Franklin's virtues, but other groups may choose to create their own.
- **Set expectations:** It's important that what everyone shares remains confidential and that everyone is committed to attending all meetings and respecting each other's contributions. Create your own ground rules.
- **Pick a date and time:** When will you hold your meetings? Days? Nights? Weekends? We have found that picking a certain day of the month (the first Tuesday of each month, for example) and sticking to it works best. We are also consistent about the time to avoid any confusion (we meet from 6-8pm each month). Choosing the dates for each meeting way in advance is also important to avoid scheduling conflicts.
- **Discuss the format:** We meet monthly for two hours at a time and split each meeting up into 40-minute segments. The first 40 minutes we talk about the previous month's virtue. The second 40 minutes we discuss the virtue for the following month and how we will commit to it. And the last 40 minutes we ask a set of questions that Franklin and his cohort asked each other.
- **Listen, connect the dots and ask questions:** We use Stanford University Institute of Design's empathy interview format. We ask a lot of "why" questions even when we think we know why someone said something. We encourage stories. We pay attention





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to nonverbal cues. And we ask questions neutrally.

- **Save time at the end:** Leave 15 minutes at the end of the group for housekeeping. When will the next meeting be? Where? Anyone have any questions or concerns? What did the group like? Dislike?
- **Create a digital way for members to stay in touch in between groups:** Some groups prefer email for all communications. Others use a text message thread to send updates or create a Google group. We have found that a WhatsApp thread works best because there are no emails to get lost in your inbox.
- **Accountability partners:** Ask your group whether they would like to pair up with a partner to help keep them on track throughout the month. Some people work better if they have someone to check in with regularly. They can always communicate with the larger group, but some people feel more comfortable sharing one-on-one.
- **Repeat:** Meet again next month (or week)!

You would make a great Benjamin Franklin Circle leader if:

- You are looking for a community with which to set goals, provide feedback and accountability, and grow.
- You want to have a space to think deeply about life's big questions.
- You believe change and growth is possible and you want to invite others to join you.
- You believe in actively creating the community you want to see in the world and that by doing so you are inspiring yourself and others to be great leaders.
- You are committed to seeing the circle through to its natural ending. That may be 13 months or 13 weeks, or whatever is best for you and your group.

Ground rules:

- Everything shared in meetings is completely confidential.
- Don't judge others, but feel free to ask them why they chose a certain commitment and if they are pushing themselves far enough in their goals. There is a fine line between being critical and being helpful, so when in doubt respect each member's understanding of what he or she needs at that moment.
- Joining a Benjamin Franklin Circle is a commitment. You are committing not only to yourself but to the others in your group. Attendance at the meetings is critical.

Don't forget:

- **Document your meetings:** Photos and short videos are good for sharing on your blog and social media (if everyone is open to it). Let us know about any content you have and we would be happy to share on our own social channels. Ask if anyone in the



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group would be willing to write a short blog post about what they learned from the meeting or something they learned about themselves from joining the group. Feel free to use the hashtag #benfranklincircles and tag us on Facebook and Twitter:

www.facebook.com/benfranklincircles/

www.facebook.com/thefamilydinnerproject/

@BFCircles

@FDP_Tweets

- **Participate:** Benjamin Franklin Circle leaders are participants too. Share your story and point out patterns you see between members' stories.
- **Deep dive:** Look for opportunities to connect the dots and go deeper.
- **Take notes:** We have found it helpful to send a short wrap-up email with members' commitments and any ideas for books, films or other tips and tools that members shared with the group after the meeting. Assigning a different note taker at each meeting can help make members feel more personally involved. You don't have to do everything. Delegate!