

FAMILY DINNER CAN (AND MAYBE SHOULD) BE A PICNIC



Food

Got time to pack something special in the basket? Try this yogurt-marinated Oven Fried Chicken for a healthier take on a picnic favorite!



Fun

What better way to enjoy a picnic dinner than with the classic “Going on a Picnic” game?



Conversation

If you're celebrating a father this month (or someone who's like a father to you), check out the dad-focused conversation starters on these printable placemats and cards!



Summertime will be here before we know it, and with the warm weather comes the opportunity to change up the dinner table routines we've been sticking with all year long. It's not just fun to take dinnertime outside; it can also be necessary, as the final weeks of the school year tend to bring a rush of last sporting events and ceremonies, and the summer months follow with adventures and excursions that can have families out of the house well past the dinner hour.

Whether in summertime or any other time of year, outdoors or indoors, a picnic dinner can be a practical and fun way to make sure that your family shares mealtimes whenever and wherever you are. Here's how — and why — you should consider making picnics a regular part of your family dinner strategy.

Picnic dinners mean togetherness on the go.

Sometimes it feels like family dinner just can't happen in the midst of all our other scheduled commitments. Packing up some sandwiches and enjoying them together wherever you land — on the soccer sidelines, in the lobby before the dance recital, outside the school auditorium or even in a parking lot (tailgating, anyone?) — can make a big difference in how you feel about a "rushed" mealtime. Just 10 minutes of sitting face to face and sharing your picnic dinner will do much more for your connections with each other (and your mood!) than cramming in a drive-thru dinner en route, so opt for the picnic if you have a few minutes to spare!

Moving dinner away from the table shakes things up.

A little switch in the usual routine can really lift the mood and make expected rituals feel new again. Even if you'll be at home and able to serve dinner at the table during your usual mealtime, taking it outdoors — or to the living room floor, if the weather isn't cooperating — could be just what you need to get everyone relaxing and interacting more comfortably. Let the picnic blanket give you permission to move freely, eat with your fingers and focus more on each other than table manners, and see what develops!

Eating outside opens up the fun.

The Family Dinner Project is all about food, fun and conversation — with an emphasis on fun! Moving dinner outdoors provides an automatic opportunity to add new elements of family fun to the mealtime. An added bonus could be stimulating appetites in reluctant eaters, since research shows that kids who have recess before lunchtime at school eat more and better-balanced meals than peers who don't get playtime first. Try adding some family playtime in the great outdoors before you serve your picnic dinner, and you just might find that the food goes down easier after all that fun!

BRINGING A BREATH OF FRESH AIR TO THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT

Family dinner isn't the only thing getting a little fresh air this summer! The Family Dinner Project is working on a refresh, too — a new, improved and more user-friendly website, so you can spend less time looking for the content you love, and more time connecting with your family. Stay tuned for updates, and look for the big reveal later this summer!

THINK OUTSIDE THE SCREENS

While you're eating outside, you've got a built-in excuse to make sure that dinner is screen-free, which presents a perfect opportunity to practice face-to-face social skills that our

<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/newsletter/family-dinner-can-and-maybe-should-be-a-picnic/>

“digital native” kids may lack. We love this tip from Parents Magazine: Have a staring contest with your kids! The time-honored childhood activity is a great way to build comfort with prolonged eye contact, and can lead to more nuanced lessons about making eye contact during conversations over time.

REAL FAMILY DINNER PROJECTS: THE GELLER-PYNE FAMILY

Meet the Geller-Pynes! This family of three juggles the commitments of an active middle schooler and two working parents, including one job with highly unpredictable (and often lengthy) hours. They also stay active in their community and hold a number of volunteer positions, making family dinner a challenge, but also a much-needed respite from their busy schedules.

The Family:

Bill, Stephanie and daughter Neala, 12. The Geller-Pynes hail from Cranston, RI.

The Goal:

Currently, Neala's sports and after-school schedule is at its peak, while Stephanie's job in educational policy has added many late work nights to the calendar. Trying to make sure to squeeze in a sit-down meal for all three family members, most nights of the week, is their main goal this Spring!

The Challenges:

With so many commitments on the calendar, plus middle-school homework to deal with, the Geller-Pynes are feeling the pinch. In order for Neala to get a reasonable amount of sleep, dinner needs to be eaten and cleaned up by 8:30 or 9:00 p.m. at the latest, but that can feel like an ambitious deadline during the 7th inning of a softball game. Currently, Stephanie says, the only way that she and Bill have managed to consistently get dinner on the table at the desired hour has been to make sure that the parents do their best to split responsibilities: One handles activities, carpooling and cheering Neala on at her games, while the other heads home as soon as possible after work to get dinner started. “It's helping,” Stephanie says, “but it's a bummer to have to miss her games and practices.”

The Strategies:

Besides trading off who stays home and who gets to be the cheering section at the field, the family has developed simple strategies that help them get food on the table fast as needed. “Rotisserie chicken in the cold weather, and lots of grilling in the summer!” The bonus of grilling or using store-bought cooked chicken as the basis for a quick meal is that both strategies also minimize cleanup, so there's more time to relax at the table (or a more realistic chance of making the bedtime deadline).

The Food:

Neala, like many pre-teens, prefers burgers and grilled corn on the cob. Her parents have more sophisticated tastes and make sure to serve a wide variety of foods and flavors. One dish that everyone can agree on is chicken baked with pancetta and olives, which appears on the Geller-Pyne table frequently during the colder months.

The Takeaway:

The good news about having to put in a lot of effort to keep family dinners on the schedule is that it can really help define what the priorities are. “Sometimes family dinners are the only time we're all together all day, so we really appreciate them and need them, even, and maybe especially, during busy periods,” Stephanie says.

The Best Part:

The Geller-Pynes can all agree that the best part of family dinner is having fun and spending time together, “even if that means eating at TV tables and watching a favorite show, like Bob's Burgers.”

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<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/blog/family-blog/real-family-dinner-projects-geller-pyne-family/>



OVEN-FRIED CHICKEN

This recipe comes to us courtesy of team member Bri DeRosa, who originally posted a version of it on her blog *Red, Round, or Green*. Bri notes that the coating on the chicken can be a little delicate, so handle with care!



Ingredients:

16 bone-in chicken drumsticks

- 2 cups plain yogurt
- 1 cup milk
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper

• For the coating:

- 2 cups whole wheat bread crumbs
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- About 12 tablespoons of olive or coconut oil, plus more for drizzling

Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, combine the yogurt, milk, 1 tsp. of salt, and 1/2 tsp. of pepper. Add the chicken and toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate for anywhere from 3-24 hours.
2. Preheat your oven to 400 degrees.
3. Liberally coat the bottom of one or two rimmed baking sheets with oil. Set aside.
4. In a shallow dish, combine the bread crumbs, paprika, garlic powder, 1/2 tsp. of salt, and 1/2 tsp. pepper.
5. Remove a drumstick from the yogurt mixture, shaking off any excess. Roll the drumstick in the bread crumb mixture to coat thoroughly. Set on a prepared baking sheet.
6. Repeat the breading procedure with the remaining chicken. Drizzle the top of the drumsticks with additional oil.
7. Bake at 400 degrees for 20 minutes, then carefully flip the drumsticks over and bake for another 20 minutes, until the chicken is cooked through and the breading is brown and crisp.
8. Allow the chicken to rest for 10-15 minutes before serving.



FAMILY TREE

“I’m going on a picnic and I’m bringing...” The first person to go completes the sentence with a word that starts with “A.” The next person repeats what the first person said and adds a word that starts with “B.” Continue through the alphabet until you can’t think of any more things to bring on your picnic!

Contributed by The Family Dinner Project Team.

<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/fun/im-going-on-a-picnic/>



TALK ABOUT: FATHER'S DAY

Use these conversation starters around the dinner table:

Tell me something that you learned today that you think I might not know.

What is the best gift you’ve ever received?

What does it mean to be brave? When have you been brave?

What 3 words would you use to describe your family?

The Family Dinner Project Printable Placemats:

1. Print on standard 8.5 x 11 Paper. 2. Cut along red cutlines. 3. Write your names. 4. Set them on the table & have fun!

Cut Line

FATHER'S DAY

A PICTURE FOR MY DAD:

Your Name: _____

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1 Tell me something you learned today that you think I might not know.
- 2 If you were a utensil, which you be. Why?
- 3 Do you think it's possible to change the world? Why or why not?



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G FATHER'S DAY

A PICTURE FOR MY DAD:

A large rectangular area defined by a dashed line, intended for a child to draw a picture of their father.

Your Name: _____

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

1 What is the best gift you've ever received?

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

3 What is the hardest thing about being your age? What is the best thing about it?



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G FATHER'S DAY

A PICTURE FOR MY DAD:

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1 What does it mean to be brave? When have you been brave?
- 2 What is one thing you did today to help other people?
- 3 If you could live during another time in history, when would want to live? Why?

THE FAMILY DINNER PROJECT

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G FATHER'S DAY

A PICTURE FOR MY DAD:

A large rectangular area defined by a dashed line, intended for a child to draw a picture of their father.

Your Name: _____

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1 What 3 words would you use to describe your family?
- 2 What makes you laugh really hard?
- 3 You have a sailboat big enough to sail around the world. Where would you go?



The Family Dinner Project Printable Father's Day Card

1. Print on standard 8.5 x 11 Paper. 2. Cut along orange lines. 3. Fold along gray lines 3. Fill out your answers. 4. Give it to your dad.

Cut Line

BACK

Fold Line

FRONT



To _____

From _____



HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!

Fold Line

What 3 words would you use to describe our family?

One thing my father has taught me is:

If I spent a whole day with my dad, we would:

One word I would use to describe Dad is: